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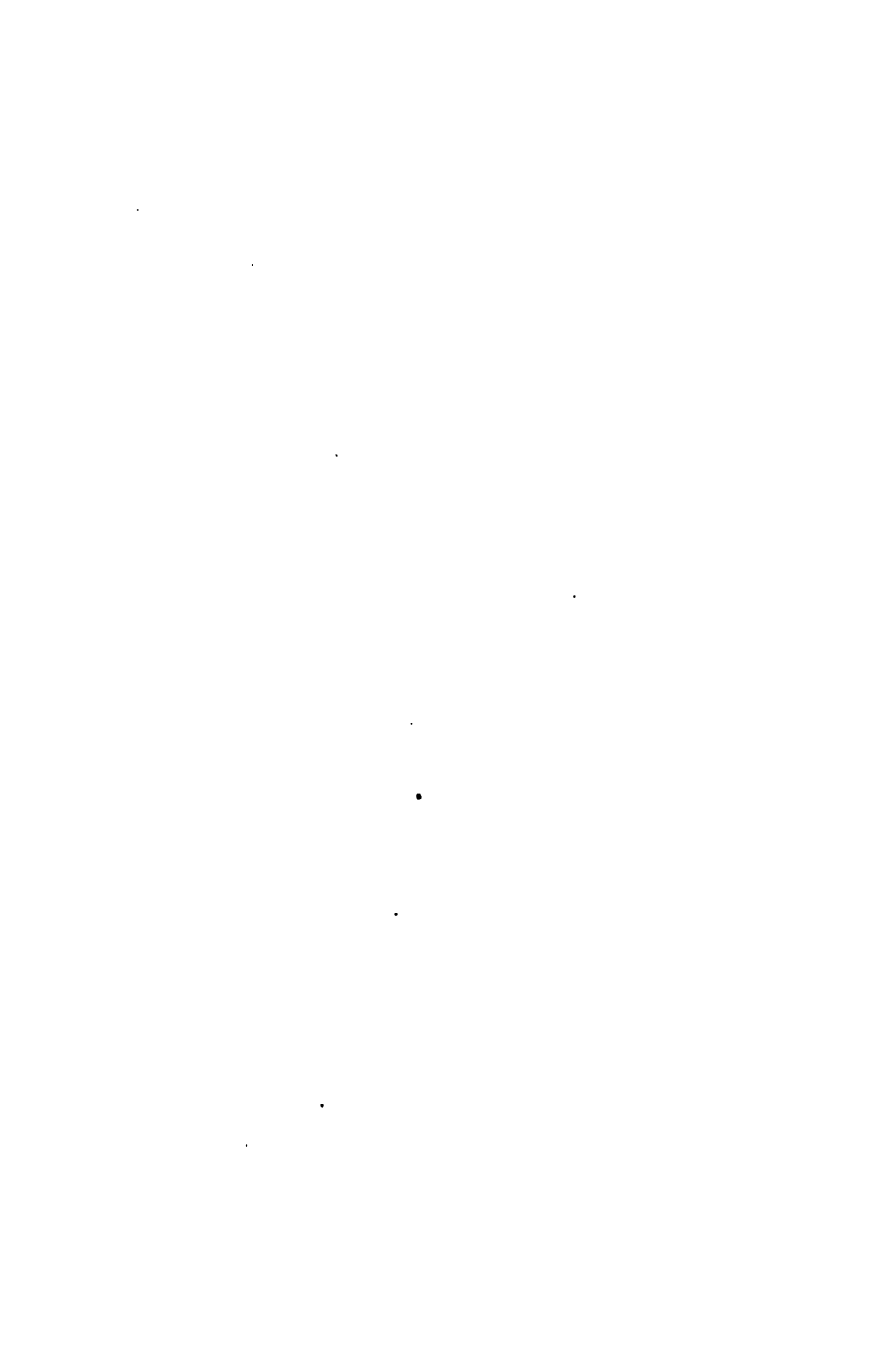


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THE CUCKOO'S NEST

O blithe New-Comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering voice? . . .

To seek thee I did often rove
Through woods and on the green;
And thou wert still a hope, a love;
Still longed for,—never seen.

—*Wordsworth.*

For I a ballad will repeat
Which men full true shall find,
Your marriage comes by destiny,
Your cuckoo sings by kind.
—“*All's Well That Ends Well.*”

THE CUCKOO'S NEST

BY

MARTHA GILBERT DICKINSON BIANCHI

*Author of "A MODERN PROMETHEUS," "THE
CATHEDRAL," "WITHIN THE HEDGE," etc.*

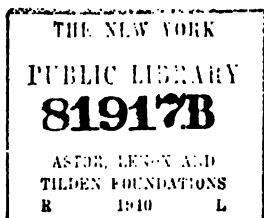


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F



From his corner of the balustrade high encircling the towers of Notre Dame, a beast in stone with wings massive and tongue derisively outrun looks off over Paris, resting his weather-beaten cheek upon his hand as were his watch destined to be long unrelieved.

Seasons, histories, night and day leave him as they found him, — staring off over the tragedy and comedy stretched forth beneath him, a veritable mask of Satire or of Fate.

**TO HIM THIS CHRONICLE
OF FOLLY IS DEDICATED.**



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THE CUCKOO'S NEST

CHAPTER I

FALLING LEAVES

WHEN the Champs Elysées is brave with yellow flags flaunting the Salon of Autumn, and the yellow leaves are falling upon the statues in the garden of the Tuileries under the dismal rain; when the salvias and asters and geraniums, those grenadier guards of November, are first singed black in the Bois, whose borders have been as a cry of triumphal colour, and the white swans look cold and comfortless at the first sharp premonition of winter frost, Paris sighs:

“Le beau temps est passé.”

The Parisian adds, with a shrug, perhaps, *c'est court*,—*le beau temps*; *comme l'amour ou la jeunesse*; and plunges himself more deeply into his favourite folly, to prolong the brief period of his personal *beau temps*. The approach of winter is always sad. Soon it will be adieu Paris for Nice and Monte Carlo, or for southern Italy, with its harbours where shimmering seas and flaring roses hold perpetual summer in thrall, or for the stately hibernation in some isolated *château*, enliv-

ened at intervals only by the hunt and its attendant gaieties; none of which is—alas!—Paris.

One by one the Americans, unless they be of the blue-stocking order, candidates for the Sorbonne, lured by the Beaux Arts, or the hope of vocal metamorphosis under the inspiration of the unique “Jean,” are turning homeward or southward.

Paris has been full as never before of frenzied women, inciting each other to still more extravagant and exclusive “creations” in costume, still more soul-absorbing “occasions” in lingerie; the double line of waiting carriages and motor cars has blocked all the rue de la Paix before Paquin’s, as usual, and spilled over into the Place Vendôme to wind around the column of Napoleon. The dear indulgent American husbands have, metaphorically and literally, idled on the kerb until it was time to pay their incomprehensible bills and worry about the duties, longing for their clubs, their native tongue, their native land, with a flaming patriotism never known to them before.

In one of the smaller hotels, not far from the Opéra, and not too far from the Rond Point, where the clientèle is justly boasted to be one of the most exclusively desirable, a score or more of casual acquaintances were taking their after-dinner coffee together in the glass-covered courtyard, on the eve of their several departures from Paris, discussing their plans for the coming season after the familiar manner of travellers. The waiters ran about, deftly supplying an empty cup here, a match there, refilling a liqueur glass or fetching another chair.



Through the expanse of glass separating them from the café the later diners were visible. Gipsy music was faintly audible from the more distant table d'hôte. The bus, clattering in with crackings of its whip and skilful roundings of the rhododendron-covered fountain in the middle, was now unloading its world-worn baggage and weary "voyageurs," affording temporary diversion to the onlookers—and often a surprised and cordial recognition.

The American husband is always glad when this time comes; too often, Paris is only the waste space lying between him and the happy moment when he boards the special train de luxe labelled *Exprès pour New York* at the Gare San Lazare. He deserves a chapter to himself for his martyrdoms. He ought to be canonised—and left at home. As a rule he does not speak French; frequently he would scorn to stoop to it if he could.

He does not enjoy playing about with his women in the daytime as the foreigner assuredly does, and the theatre—his best resource against being utterly dull—is unintelligible to him; or perhaps his enthusiasm for the lighter forms of amusement comprehensible through his eyes is dampened by the partner of his joys, who cries down being expected to go out evenings after standing six hours for an arbitrary modiste during the day.

So he, poor fellow, goes on dreary historical jaunts alone to the tombs of Saint Denis or Père la Chaise, or to see the remains of Napoleon,—never by any chance selecting the auspicious day or hour when it is per-

mitted to enter, wandering back afterward at night to smoke and talk stale politics with another victim like himself,—exchanging indifferent comments on the paintings in the Louvre or telling how some one cheated him with a bad five-franc piece,—going to bed at last to dream of the statue of Liberty in the blue waters of the bay at home—“Home, sweet home,” in spite of trusts and frenzied finance and assassinated rulers!

Most of the circle to-night were evidently Americans on the point of sailing or taking flight for some milder destination. In spite of the brightness of the environment there was a damp chill in the air—the women drew their light wraps closer.

“What a climate!” ejaculated a big, grumbling husband, who had been openly yawning in the face of all France, and thanking God audibly he was to leave it on the morrow, to the amusement of his listeners.

“You won’t find a Café de Paris in New York!” warned a little woman, exultantly; “don’t forget that!”

“Café de Paris!” exclaimed another husband, wearied of his European programme. “I have been over here two months and I have got to do Rome yet; but I would eat snails and tails and rails and nails if I was going home to-morrow! Wouldn’t you, Arthur?”

The man he addressed was laughing too helplessly to reply at once. He was a handsome specimen of his country, in the middle thirties, perhaps, though his hair

was slightly grey, enhancing the beauty of his dark eyes.

"No; I am content to loaf a while longer," he said, lazily blowing his smoke into the air. "I shall see the château country and then settle down on the Riviera and get my backbone warm if possible."

"My sister said her backbone was never warm once during all the time she spent on the Riviera," contributed an anxious-looking woman whose slightly raised eyebrows gave her a permanent effect of expecting the worst. "George, do go and see if those don't look like our trunks. I told the man not to take them until morning and I am sure he has. He did not even try to understand me, and those do look exactly like our trunks,—with one left behind, too!"

Her husband rose obediently, and she continued her disheartening prognostications, "They don't understand heating in Europe. That is the reason we always come over in summer."

No one seemed eager to follow up the subject except the wife of the man addressed as Arthur, who tossed it aside cheerily with: "Well, we have wanted to see the château country so long, our blood will tingle with the thrill of it all, I guess. My heart gives an extra beat every time I realise it is almost within our reach."

"A fur-lined feeling, eh?" suggested her husband sympathetically. "Not a bad idea that,—fur-lined hearts for unheated countries! You ought to take out a patent on it."

"There might be a lot of money made out of that at

home, used as an advertisement," struck in another man judiciously; "well worked up, of course," he amended. "You would be surprised to know what fortunes are made in advertising now," he continued, addressing them all; "it is really becoming an art in itself."

They listened courteously enough, with straying eyes for any chance diversion, as he rambled on in detail, with the happy expansion of the habitual monologist—all save a sharp-faced man who was frankly waiting to talk himself. He turned toward the enthusiastic woman at the first break and interrupted eagerly:

"Mrs. Johnston, you seem to be the only one of them all with the true spirit. You want to see things; not buy things and eat things sitting around on the sidewalks and experimenting with dyspepsia at the dead of night. Now, I am that sort myself. I worked hard for forty years and I said to myself day in and day out all that time: the day I retire I start to see the pyramids! Didn't I, Molly?"

Molly nodded shyly. She played this responsive part solely in the life of her loquacious spouse.

"Splendid!" cried Arthur Johnston. "Did you do it?"

"The very same day. I had a feeling toward the end that I should not get there in time,"—he took out his huge gold monogrammed watch and consulted it carefully,—"I have been out of business just ten days, eighteen hours, and forty-seven minutes," he announced. "And I guess I am almost half way," he added laconically.

"Oh, they will wait for you!" said the monologist. "Pyramids are not like business; they don't have to dread competition."

The husband who had been sent to investigate the luggage, returned and drank his cold coffee without a murmur.

"What did you find out?" demanded his wife, as if suspecting him of aiding and abetting high treason.

"It is all right," he assured her; "that was the baggage of the Duchess of Marylebone and her suite."

"It could not have been. It was marked 'N.'" objected the wife.

"The labels were probably over half the letter," suggested Arthur Johnston in a pacifying tone.

"How could they have been over all the M's the same way?" fretted the little woman; "I shall have to go myself, I suppose; men are so careless! Of course her trunks would be carried to Calais for the channel crossing, and ours ought to be at the station at the other end of the city early in the morning."

"Now, Lizzie; don't worry!" said her husband firmly. Lizzie sat down again, but she continued a bitter narrative of friends whose baggage had gone astray, been stolen outright, been pillaged; adding in conclusion, "Now, George, all the M's could not have been covered at the same angle by those labels. That is simply silly."

There was thunder in the air, but Mrs. Johnston scattered it by saying, "The Duchess and her suite are going to America also to-morrow; in any case the

luggage has the same destination, so it is sure to be safe."

The men looked grateful. "I wonder if it will be warm at Naples——" began the climatic woman vaguely.

"Oh, don't go to Naples! I should not want to go there after the eruption in 1906," cried a handsome woman hitherto silent.

"And the risk of earthquakes, too!" chimed in the anxious Lizzie.

"You make me think of the man who said he really enjoyed the earthquake," remarked Arthur Johnston, "because it was the only thing that had happened since his marriage that was not his fault."

"I pity a pessimist; I am an optimist myself," said Lizzie's husband stoutly, fearful, perhaps, lest his laughter had betrayed too sharp an edge to his enjoyment of the story.

As the general ripple was subsiding and they began on other topics, a girl stepped from the writing-room and looked about her as if in search. Recognising Mrs. Johnston she came toward her with a pretty eagerness entirely devoid of self-consciousness; the self-containment through inward repose rather than the public bravado of the young women of her country that is proverbial among Europeans. The men welcomed her with lingering, approving eyes, the women greeted her with answering smiles, as she dropped into a chair hastily placed for her at Mrs. Johnston's side.

Mary Ingram was a girl whom men liked without women's hating her for it. She was not beautiful

enough to arouse distrust in the opposing breast; by common consent she was void of coquetry,—a girl to trust with one's husband and encourage a weakness for in the heart of one's oldest son. She was the only child of a distinguished chief justice, who felt the sole lack of his motherless girl to lie in her utter ignorance of the world. Being unable to reconcile his exacting judicial duties with the freedom that allowed him to wander about with her himself, he had sent her to Europe with her maid, to make visits among his old friends there and later to travel with her aunt, long ago married in England, until he should be able to join her for the summer. It seemed to him that he was wise in this. He had increasing premonitions that his little girl was almost a woman—and an attractive woman, which was worse. Already her gift for languages involved her in a popularity at the foreign embassies in Washington too universal for his personal liking. A son-in-law from Buda-Pesth, or even from some less irregular spot on the distant planets, did not appeal to him. His future and that of his daughter were his God-given earnings from a studious and laborious life. He did not intend that either should be profaned in its ultimate consecration.

So when Mary told him hesitatingly of her love affair with one of his own friends, a man only ten years his junior, he felt a load of nameless anxiety roll off his shoulders, although reluctant to accept his deliverance at the possible sacrifice of his daughter's wider experience.

He had talked gravely, yet freely, with the distinguished scholar so unexpectedly presented to him in this startlingly unforeseen connection, and their conversation had ended in a compromise. Mary was to travel abroad a year, see life, and take time to grow a little older; after that, if unchanged in her desire, no opposition should be raised to delay the marriage.

Upon only one other condition had he insisted: they were not to write. He understood too well the power of love-letters over the imagination of a girl alone amid romantic surroundings, to permit that undue influence upon her choice.

Mary herself had been the one to oppose the scheme for her welfare. "Lose a whole year at the start?" she had protested, rousing a hint of smothered fires in the calm eyes of her lover.

"I am sorry for you both," said the father slowly; "but," appealing to the man who had been always his friend, "you agree with me? you consider it only just?"

"Not only just but imperative," had been the prompt answer, with a smile of confidence for the girl that revealed hope as a certainty.

She had sailed away, laughing in her heart at the scepticism of men regarding women's fidelity. On the steamer she had met the Johnstons. Discovering in Alice the sister of a friend, and in Arthur the author of several books she had long made quite her own, she attached herself to them, and, on their arrival in Paris, begged them to let her accompany them to Tours before joining her aunt or paying her visits. This they

were only too happy to concede after the paternal consent had been duly asked and given.

"Have you had your coffee?" Alice was asking her now; "or shall I send for a fresh pot? I suppose you have. I saw Lady Kintore swoop down on you as soon as we left the dining-room." Mary Ingram laughed; and when she laughed everyone else usually laughed too. Nobody ever cared particularly what occasioned her laughter—it was enough to set the sourest mouth out of line, to watch her eyes and the spirit of mirth personified there.

"Yes; she took me up to her sitting-room for coffee. Her nephew, Colonel Lyndon-Carr, was there too," she added inconsequently. She did not add that while Lady Kintore wrote a necessary note or two to catch the evening post they two had sat in the firelight absorbed in that dear and venturesome game of fitting a key to the human heart while "both time and the hour ran swift away."

"Well, Mistress Mary, whom is Tiberius throwing to the lions to-night?" said Arthur Johnston, rising and drawing a chair nearer hers as he spoke.

"Why do you call her that?" asked she, opening her eyes very wide.

"Because she is a tyrant," he replied.

"She is a social angler of wonderfully acute perceptions and estimates," corrected Alice. "She pounces on the most desirable person with unerring aim."

"And drops them for a bigger fish with brighter speckles!" cried Arthur.

"She is a very brilliant woman when she thinks it is worth her while," insisted his wife.

"I think she is a very sad woman," said Mary thoughtfully. "She has a great deal of tenderness in her nature, and somehow I feel it has been repressed all her life; I think she seems afraid to show it."

"That is English"—began Alice, but the group was breaking up. Amid the exchange of cards, evasive amenities, and tradespeople's addresses likely to prove useful, there was no opportunity for further asides.

"After I have seen the pyramids I may run across you again. I have always said I wanted to see Venice,—haven't I, Molly?"

"They say Venice pays even if you go out there on purpose," agreed the monologist.

"You think if we were near it would pay us to stop, do you?" Arthur's eyes were sparkling with enjoyment as he put the question.

"Well, of course it is not like the pyramids—you can't expect that," he replied; "can you, Molly?" Her habitual support was not lacking, though she was overwhelmed by the anxious Lizzie and her George, who were reiterating the hour for their morrow's calling in many keys, apprehensive of a forthcoming disappointment after all.

"Remember now," said Arthur good-naturedly, turning to the concierge, "you are to wake and call her early. She's to be Queen of the May!"

The fellow took off his gold-corded cap with an extra

scrape as he replied respectfully, "But certainly, m'sieur"—to their unspeakable delight.

"You know, really," said Arthur, "these fellows understand wonderfully. I put a franc into the hand of my porter with my shoes and remark conversationally,

'I stood on the bridge at midnight
When the clock was striking the hour'—

and in five minutes he has them blacked and back again."

"Money talks," exclaimed the business man.

"But if you do not speak French you miss the knowledge of the people," remonstrated Alice.

"Perhaps I do; but what I lose in knowledge I make up in amusement. Moreover, that is your mission and Mary Ingram's: to keep the level of information up to the level of fun. Yesterday I rescued myself by a passage from the French Testament; when I found the man who spoke English was out of the shop, I just said, 'I go but I will return unto you.' I did not wish to be irreverent, but it happened to be the only sentence in the language I remembered."

"Oh, don't speak anything but English ever," begged Mary Ingram, "you would have the whole world in our party if you did; you have made friends with every American in the hotel since we have been here, and we shall never see anything of you if the foreigners once get a taste for you."

"Arthur's geniality and his easy love of humanity

combined attach all sorts of people to him before he knows it," said Alice rather ruefully. "People take to him on the slightest provocation,—whether they are of his sort or not. This heterogenous humanity here collected is a good example."

"Life in a European hotel is like nothing but the permutations and combinations I studied in my arithmetic when I was a boy," said Arthur smiling. "I never took that seriously and I treat this the same way."

"Your social arithmetic is more like mixed allegation to me," retorted Alice.

"Recite your rule for that."

"I can't. The only rule I ever happened to remember or apply to social arithmetic is to invert your divisor and proceed as in multiplication. That smooths out every complicated problem if discerningly applied."

"She means cancellation," he explained to Mary, with a merry face of marital consternation under merited rebuke.

Next morning they were off while Paris was sweeping the broad streets and effacing the debris of one more night. The air was chill and raw; the sun scarcely risen. The army of porters in green aprons that sprang up on all sides, to be tipped for imaginary services rendered during their brief stay, looked to their sleepy eyes like the plague of grasshoppers that fell upon Pharaoh to devour his substance.

"Where has your fun level sunk to now?" enquired Alice as Arthur displayed an empty pocket-book.

"If I were obliged to make one of them understand my native tongue at this instant I should only gasp:

'Break, break, break,
'At the foot of thy crags, O sea!'

It is the turn of knowledge now," he said sadly.

But Mary, leaning out of her carriage window, cried, "Oh, do look up at the Convent of the Sacred Heart! It hangs above the mist, suspended way up above Montmartre like a heavenly vision."

When they had gone, the tardily rising sun sank his undecided beams into the green precincts of the old Hôtel de Cluny, where he had often found them among the souvenirs of antiquity,—in vain; peered through the lacy windows of Saint Étienne du Mont and wandered up its winding pulpit stair, gilded the dome of the Panthéon in passing, touched the white tower of Saint Jacques, flowed awhile with the current of the evil-hearted Seine, flashed on a funeral cortège entering the great portal of Notre Dame, and thence ascended to the encircling parapet surrounding the stately bell-towers where a beast in stone, holding his weather-beaten cheek in his hand, saw the day return unmoved, bearing life and death in its train. Too often had he seen the harlequin leaves of autumn fall or the plumes of horse-chestnut bloom wreath the flying buttress in the renescent springtime, to heed the progress of the seen or the failure of the vanished from the diminished world beneath him.

CHAPTER II

“ COMPLET ”

THE scene at the Gare d'Orléans was one of ordinary morning bustle and stir. Little locomotives were emitting distracted shrieks like any nervous woman. Officials echoed on their penny whistles, amid travellers hurrying and jostling, and the continual *s'il vous plait!* of porters pushing high piled trucks of heavy luggage courteously along the crowded platforms. Flower girls, with a shrewd eye for the expansive-hearted upon whom to press their blooming wares, were much in evidence; also the newsdealer, wheeling a portable library containing everything from a few musty novels of Trollope in the Tauchnitz edition to the latest feuilleton, damp from the press; Figaro and Le Rire vying with melodramatic French novels in cover designs that sounded the entire gamut of what George Saintsbury calls “plain and fancy adultery.”

Alice and Mary had gone on with a porter to secure an empty compartment, leaving Arthur to register their luggage. Their belongings established satisfactorily and their man dismissed, they left the train, and, idling at a little distance, amused themselves with the antics of others less unhurried or more exacting in the serious matter of choosing places.

On returning to their own carriage what was their

amazement to find the windows pasted over with forbidding yellow labels of "complet" and the door securely locked! In vain did they explain to the guard. He did not understand,—with a density that would have been easily comprehensible to more experienced continental travellers than they. Arthur, hastening toward them at the last second possible, after the true American manner, could do little to straighten the complication except by the sublime authority of sex. The male compels in Europe when his mate utterly fails; in a scrimmage the eternal feminine exerts no softening influence upon the railroad officials of any European system. To them, man is still in the ascendant.

Alice explained and reiterated in her careful, studious French. Arthur merely stood there helpless, until the train began to move; then he hustled them unceremoniously into the corridor. This manœuvre resulted in the disappearance of the guard and the snapping open of the doors he had so officiously locked, followed by a lively dialogue between himself and the unseen parties now occupying the curtained compartment. The train was already well started, rattling busily over the switches, and the guard was doubtless somewhat appalled by the spectacle of three unplaced Americans,—one a gentleman,—cut off from their small baggage by this arbitrary performance.

He began hesitatingly to apologise and protest; but was overborne by a high clear voice with an unmistakably British accent: "It is of no consequence if there has been a mistake. Cook was paid to reserve this com-

partment; number seven, as usual. If you have made a faux pas it is quite your own affair. Ça ne fait rien! Rien du tout!"—with growing emphasis on the *rien* as the unimportance of the misunderstanding reënforced itself upon the speaker.

"Vous voyez, monsieur et dames?" declared the guard turning back to the others. "There is within, une grande dame Anglaise;—c'est presque impossible,—since she wishes not to derange herself."

"We have paid for our places. Tell her so," insisted Alice.

Again the guard disappeared from the waist up as he leaned headlong into the enemy's country.

"Find them a place then! It is your affair; to me—c'est-égal" retorted the aggressive voice, in which there had entered a distinctly aggrieved note of injustice.

"But naturally, madame, if there were another place free; but not one remains until Blois——" they heard the guard explain.

"Enfin; it is not my affair. Put them off at the first stop if you like——"

The guard turned and made a hopeless shrug; but just as he did so Alice slipped a twenty-franc piece into his hand. "Madame," he insisted, opening the door to its full width as he spoke, "madame"—he began again with the firmness of a man who has just drunk a glass of cognac in imagination—"pardon; but the small baggage already placed is that of monsieur and mesdames les voyageurs who await admittance. It is only by their

marvellous amiability that madame now enjoys a compartment virtually theirs——"

"Shut the door or I shall report you for an insolent fellow!"

"Oh, I say!" protested a voice familiar to one pair of listening ears at least. "It's a bore of course, but don't make a horrid row for the poor chap; it's beastly enough for him as it is already, you know!"

But with the sniff of a war horse about to charge, the irate feminine occupant sprang to her feet to prevent the entrance of the trio, combative to the last, when, to their mutual amusement, they found themselves facing Lady Kintore and her nephew, Colonel Lyndon-Carr.

The fire died out of her belligerent eyes at once as she extended her hand civilly in welcome to Mary Ingram.

"Now why in this world did you say you were going on at night?" she demanded, as if in self-exculpation for the recent scene.

"I did not know that I did," said Mary, whose honesty often put even her most intimate friends into awkward positions.

"Who ever could have dreamed of your thinking of taking this train?" repeated the Englishwoman vehemently.

"I only remember to have said we were going to Tours," repeated Mary; "I did not happen to think that Biarritz could be on the same route."

The train plunged into a long tunnel and all effort at conversation was cut short for the time. Alice and

Arthur settled themselves contentedly. Mary, sitting opposite Lady Kintore, was soon absorbed in the cheerful varied landscape flying by the window, quite to the exclusion of the undeniable fact that Colonel Lyndon-Carr was satisfied to take his scenery by reflection—in her face.

During the first stop, when the rattling of the train had temporarily subsided, Lady Kintore said positively to Alice: "You Americans always want the atmosphere so stuffy, I dare say the air from the windows is very trying to you; but we English perish without it. We are such a race of hardy Norsemen."

"I suppose we have our own peculiarities; most countries have," replied Alice, neutrally, in self-defence.

"I have often really thought I should like to go out to the States," ventured Lady Kintore, vaguely, as if her imagination were projecting a plunge off the side of the universe. "One hears such extraordinary things about the manners and customs of the people. It must be very interesting, I should say."

"Why do you not go over?" encouraged Alice impersonally.

"I dare say I may if I go round the world next year with my sister; one could do it by way of Japan or Africa, as so many do now-a-days; or perhaps I might stop on my way home from Australia. I have a sister there, too, I go out to see often; her husband is in the government. One often goes to the States that way, I am told."

"But we are not an adjunct to Australia; we are worth coming to see by ourselves!" cried Alice.

"I am not surprised that an Englishman did not discover America," remarked Arthur. It was an aside, but not lost.

"That is the worst of you Americans!" said Lady Kintore; "you are so very sensitive about your country, aren't you? I fancy most of the colonists are."

"Well, we don't quite all agree with Johnson that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel," interpolated Arthur; but Lady Kintore turned her attack, continuing as if eager for scientific investigation: "You American women are very intelligent, but you are so shockingly keen after the titles, aren't you?"

"Perhaps not so much as we once were," qualified Alice moderately, scenting war and employing the tactics of silence.

"But the American women make such poor wives," resumed Lady Kintore. "I have often noticed it. It is sheer folly of our men to allow themselves to be caught as they are every season. Marriages between the aristocracy and democracy never hold; it is not to be expected that they should."

"Between money and mediocrity, did you say?" asked Arthur deferentially, but she ignored his sally, to go on assertively:

"So many of our peers of the realm have got into trouble by entanglements with Americans. There was Lord Chichester, who was actually barred from court for marrying an American dancer or something horrid of that

sort; I fancy she was from South America after all, but it's all the same, of course. The King has changed all that now, since the woman's death. Sir Chichister-Chichister was badly cut up about it at the time; he left his property away from his family in consequence, but the heirs-at-law carried the day. My friend Lady Violet Spencer-Harrington—whom you saw with me in Paris once—was his cousin—one of the twins she was—they were wards in Chancery when I first knew them, and pretty girls I called them, too.

“I lost sight of them later,” she said with a sigh, rambling on with true British discursiveness. “I was a soldier's bride myself.” She straightened herself proudly.

“Our regiment was a long time away from England—a very long time. My husband never wished me to go home on a visit alone—he was a very dependent sort of person. I wound his watch for him every night of his life and always put in his studs with my own hands.” Her voice carried a conviction of supreme rectitude.

Once safely alone together in the dining-car for early déjeuner, Alice and Arthur looked at each other over their poulet and omelette.

“Do you think she bluffed? Or do you think she was really surprised to find who it was she intended to keep standing outside?” Alice demanded.

Arthur shook his head, the more civilised methods of speech being denied him by consumption of a whole lettuce leaf and a plump bit of chicken breast. When this edible impediment had been removed he burst out with—

“Solomon described her when he said ‘terrible as an army with banners’ !”

On returning to the carriage they found their cantankerous companion comfortably asleep, without regard to the number of places preëmpted by her recumbent form. Alice dropped into the one vacant seat by Mary and suggested a smoking carriage to Arthur; which he would have proposed himself had he been left to take the initiative, and not irritated by a sense of having been left no alternative—driven to it, so to speak—John Bull-dosed into it.

As the train sped on through a country literally alive with French masterpieces, with peasants reaping and stooping and going home, with the familiar but hitherto only imagined backgrounds of perpetually shifting fields, white villages, narrow lush-banked rivers, and poplar turrets, Alice fell into an idle reverie of Paris that excluded all present surroundings. Among the surviving landmarks of that city's deathless art she had felt her little personal problems too trivial for remembrance. The chant of old heroisms reaching her ears, the individual was swallowed up in the universal of this new and wider creation. All the meanness of man's grubbing, any hasty, envious view of his limited career, became too humiliating to contemplate. She was glad no one knew that she had ever been so provincial as to consider her own case exceptional. Exceptional! She laughed at her own conceit, put a fool's cap on her own head, and tore contentedly on with the train that was flying toward the château country, with another chapter in history opening before her. "All this will remain when I am gone over-seas," her musing ran: "and when the jasper sea is behind me on my last voyage. It is material and

I am immortal; but the message, too, is immortal; something of all the perished race has gone into my being, and become part of my immortality, here and now, from the ruin and repose of the feverish or perfect past." More and more distinctly "the voices" were becoming audible to her,—“the voices” heard by that other wide-eyed maid—the warrior peasant girl of Domremy.

Meanwhile, Mary Ingram had put down her novel and was again absorbed in the scenery. “Are you glad to be free of the service?” she asked after a little, of the young Englishman sitting beside her, who was moodily staring in front of him at the notice of the three grades of heat possible to be obtained by pulling once, twice, or thrice at certain knobs provided for that purpose. The initial letters of the railroad company worked into the upholstery at distractingly obscure intervals, a torment to eyes and ingenuity, also held his gaze.

He sighed regretfully before he answered her: “Do you call it free to be doing pack drill at Biarritz with a lot of stupid English one does not know,—invalided home like me? Why, it is worse than guard-mount every hour!”

“You did not want to leave the service, then; you did not come home willingly? For pleasure, I mean?”

“Well, no; rather not!” he assented warmly. “I was ordered home; and the continent is not home in any sense to an Englishman, you know.”

“Were you ill? Wounded?” her voice had the awed reverence of a woman for a wounded hero.

“No such luck!” cried the colonel, “nothing more than a bally fever that would not go down till afternoons—

lungs probably; all the India-born children of the race die of it more or less, sooner or later."

"Were you very ill?" Her eyes were compassionate, beguiling to confidence.

"Well, I admit I was off the side of the world for a few months at first."

"But you held on?"

"Rather, yes. I held on first by habit and then by gravitation——"

Lady Kintore opened her eyes. "And now you are about to hold on by attraction!" she said archly, with a coquettish flash of her still brilliant eyes. But she did not doze again. Arthur returning found them all chatting together as amicably as if the day had not begun so inauspiciously for interlopers.

Domineering, dictatorial, arrogant, Lady Kintore assuredly was, but of an intellect sufficiently keen to support her arbitrary positions. The daughter of the thirteenth baronet in line, and born with a spirit immortally unsubdued, in physical appearance she remained valiant under the touch of time: with finely cut features, eyes that could look wilted or flash like a girl's through excitement of anger or joy, beautiful white hair pompadoured rather high over a noble brow, her head held well back on her shoulders, as if in scorn of all England's enemies; her back as straight as any Tommy Atkins in her husband's crack regiment.

Arthur Johnston's pseudonym of Tiberius suited her well, and to them at least, Tiberius she was for ever to remain. Her nephew ceased his chat with Mary Ingram and turned to Alice, saying agreeably:—"Your Ameri-

can girls are awfully fetching, you know; but are they safe, eh?"

"Safe?" echoed Alice, bewildered.

"We are a bit afraid of them; they are so no end jolly you know," he confided; "but we rather like to know they are betrothed at home before they come out—then we stand less show of burning our wings. One could get on with them swimmingly, I should say; they never seem slow in the least."

"Why do you think being engaged at home makes them safer?" asked Mary Ingram, smiling an amused little smile of sheer glee.

"It can't help it, I should say. Only a cad would stalk another chap's preserve, you know, for actual game—that has a dirty resemblance to poaching."

"Your American girls have such an atrocious amount of freedom allowed them, haven't they?" exclaimed his aunt; "and they do run about such a lot, don't they? It must make them very bold, I should say," she speculated.

"You have an opportunity for judging," said Alice demurely, glancing toward Mary. Ignoring further cross-fire from Lady Kintore, she enquired of the Englishman:

"Is this the first American girl you have met? How do you get on with her? We consider her a fair sample."

"I won't be drawn!" said the young fellow, laughing. But he coloured as he attempted to elaborate his idea: "At home, you know, a chap has no chance to see any girls off parade except his cousins—and they are apt to be a bit dull and taken for granted; but in America I am

told the girls do the fellows' Latin for them and walk with them and even swim with them—but of course one fancies that is drawing it rather strong. A chap told me he stopped with a family out there—they were good people, too, he had met them at some of the best houses in London; but he found the very girl he had been sweet on and had partly gone out to see was getting letters from several Cambridge fellows at once. Not seriously, you know; she did not mean any harm, but my friend said one never could have fancied the girl was that sort—she seemed all right he said; but of course he got himself cabled for at once. He was a decent sort of chap and it cut him up a good bit at first. He had hoped to pull off a match I fancy."

Alice waited hopelessly to the end. "He has probably lost the best chance of real live happiness he will ever have!" she cried. "I can't stop to explain American institutions to you now, all at once, but if we ever meet again I will coach you an hour a day until you won't make such a mess of them!"

Lady Kintore had turned her batteries again upon Arthur, whose itinerary did not meet her approval. "I should never think of doing more than stopping off over night at Tours at this season," she complained. "Spring is the time to do the château country. You are making a sad mistake. Why don't you go on to San Sebastian or Biarritz if you want to be comfortable, and enjoy a beautiful climate and scenery?"

"Perhaps we may, later," he replied. "I am very much fascinated by the French and their France; I mean

to see every corner of it if I possibly can before I am obliged to leave it."

"The French are a very weak nation," asserted the clear querulous voice. "They will never produce a Napoleon from the people again! Never! But I suppose a democracy appeals to you"—indulgently.

"I never would submit to a monarchy unless I were the monarch," said Arthur.

"The French are great fighters," interpolated Lyndon-Carr, "fight like death; but I often wonder if they know what they are fighting for?"

"It is *vive la guerre!*—*vive le roi!* *vive la république!* I suppose," said Arthur, "*vive* anything that boils to a brilliant, scalding, tragic crisis!"

"The French have no heart for content," said Lady Kintore.

"I will admit you that," said Arthur. "Dancing at a fête or dying in a ditch it is always *vive la vie!* A flash of the eyes means revolution, just as a cry meant St. Bartholomew."

Lady Kintore nodded approvingly. "Their ear is as intent for bugles as it is deaf to the voice of conscience," she said. "To shine, to seem, to dare! is the Frenchman's creed. What will it make of his France in the end?"

"Well, we want to see the remnants of what it has been—I should not mind writing an essay or two on them if the mood came over me——"

Lady Kintore cut him short. "My dear Mr. Johnston, she cried reproachfully, "I do not wish to seem rude, but

I must say I never cared for essays — even those of our own prose masters; I abhor the botany of literature. After you have analysed the style and picked off the petals of the author’s charm, you have no flower left!”

“You would not say that if you had read his essays. They are wonderful!” cried Mary Ingram. “Nobody, not even Walter Pater, writes like him.”

“How very surprising! I had always heard you Americans were so hopelessly commercial and material — one fancies you write your epics in tunnels and electrical inventions, and your lyrics are nothing more or less than money-getting contrivances.”

There was only a slight bristling of resentment, covered by general good breeding. Lady Kintore resumed her original theme reminiscently by saying: “Avignon’s a pretty town,—especially adapted for sketching. All our English girls sketch—it is a part of every gentlewoman’s education. You would find Nimes interesting; and there are some quite nice Roman ruins at Fréjus—I painted a whole season there once. You should not fail to see Lourdes; a viler inn does not exist! I shall never forget it. It was an abominably kept house; one got no veal, and the service was impertinent, beside the tariff being most exorbitant!”

“The old story,” groaned Lyndon-Carr.

“Not at all; you will find San Sebastian charming, but shockingly dear and nothing but chickens fit to eat.”

“Oh, well, life does not come with both hands full,” interrupted Alice, overhearing the trend of the argument

and bound to save Arthur an encounter. Colonel Lyndon-Carr was also to the rescue——

“Oh, Life is a barmaid hard to beat!
She mixes sour and she mixes sweet!”

He sang with a barytone familiar to many a mess-room far away.

“She brews it heady, and she brews it neat;
For Life is a barmaid hard to beat!”

“Oh, do look!” cried Mary. “Is not that the thyme in bloom? on that bank?”

“Thyme in autumn? It does not bloom then, does it?” asked Alice.

“Ah, but when is it ever out of bloom?” said Lady Kintore. Her voice had lost every scathing tone and fallen suddenly to a pitch of lingering tenderness. “The Scotch say when the wild thyme is out of bloom, love dies.” There swept over her face the shadow of a passionate sadness at the close of her sentence, changing it almost beyond recognition.

The guard came to warn them that they were approaching Blois and must prepare to “descend” at once.

“You had far better go on to Biarritz,” urged Lady Kintore, as the farewells were being said; torn between her obsession to prove others wrong in their choice and her own instinct for the preservation of her nephew from farther contact with these presumably designing Americans.

“We may all meet at Monte Carlo, later,” Arthur was

saying carelessly. "That is the bank where the wild *time* blows all the year around, I guess."

Mary Ingram was shaking hands stiffly with Colonel Lyndon-Carr.

"I do hope we shall run across each other again," she was saying, ingenuously. "It is so pleasant to know some one in a strange country—it does not matter so much who——"

"We shall. That is if she mixes sweet—" He answered so low that his august aunt could not catch the words, accompanying his little speech with a long look that made Mary feel suddenly as if the wild thyme were blooming in the corridor of the now slackening train. As they "descended" Lady Kintore stooped, and, to her surprise, kissed her heartily on both cheeks.

When they were at dinner that night their chat naturally recurred to their fellow-travellers of the morning.

"You know she is just a temperamental scold. She does not really care about it; and I find it easy to forgive her everything because she is really a warm-hearted, brilliant woman who knows a great deal," said Alice in noble extenuation.

"A lonely woman too," urged Mary, with a far-away look of tenderness creeping into her sweet wistful eyes. "Did you notice how her whole manner changed when she was speaking of the wild thyme and its lovely legend? Her husband was older than she and a pitiful invalid at the last. She told me no one would ever know what she went through with him the last three months of his life."

"Humph!" sniffed Arthur. "No one will ever know what he went through with her all the days of his married life! Deliver me from a fighting woman!"

"But a fighting woman who knows something is privileged!" declared Alice; "and her nephew is the most benighted and best looking man I have ever chanced to encounter unclaimed."

"Yes; he is good looking, isn't he?" chimed in Mary, in good imitation of that inevitable English interrogative.

"She said benighted," reminded Arthur.

CHAPTER III

AT THE VILLA RÉSEDÁ

REMNANTS of the past held the travellers in lingering toils; it was almost February before they left their historical wanderings for the Riviera. They were detained at Biarritz by Arthur's physical breakdown and slow convalescence, and the English miladi was no longer at her address when they went to look her up according to agreement—nor had they received any tidings of her beyond a post card noting her own safe arrival some two months before.

When they actually opened their eyes the morning after their arrival at the villa between Beaulieu and Monaco, formerly a private estate, but now become a *dépendence* of an extensive hotel property, it seemed to them an awakening in another world. Like the first bees, they lost their winter torpor hanging between orange orchards and the blue of the Mediterranean. They rhapsodised over each new blossom, grew silent with the heady scent of violet and jasmine, rose and hyacinth. The carpets of wild jonquil growing under lemon trees in flower, the gardens of camellia and oleander, fascinated their gaze, in turn, while, in sharp contrast, rugged ravines and craggy headlands presented their dangers—and beyond them limp sails were drifting desultorily out,

Below them they beheld a lazy sea, tinged with distant blurs of colours ranging from aquamarine to purple; in the blue of a sharply indented bay clear to its pebbled depths, strange fauna distinctly visible, illumined by the darting gleams from scarcely moving surface waters; on the tiny strip of beach a few seine boats drawn high, as if to rest; stretching away into the sea, Cap Ferrat, its emerald outline no less vivid than the waves that washed its ragged shores; on every side the sibylline palms with their green tangles where afternoon seems perpetually dreaming, drowsing on the balmy air; always the olives meshed in their filagree shadows; and at last in the background interminably the grim mountain peaks rising like a hostile fate above the spectacular, ecstatic surf and shore—in brief, the Mediterranean! Each wave brought half allusions wafted from the Virgilian measure, the pastoral rhythms of Theocritus or the tragic monotones of Elba. History, poetry, and Sicilian song, the bridal melody of Tritons, the fleeting smile of Aphrodite, the chant of conqueror and captive, all the cadenced dreams of a tideless sea were dying away in blue coruscations—mere water enchanted by the wind, breathing immortally of the dead generations that haunted its gliding marvel!

A few days after their installation, as the French designate the process of getting settled, Alice sat contentedly on the terrace of the hotel one afternoon waiting for Arthur to join her for tea. The air was bracing enough to make one feel energetic, and she rose and walked back and forth, meantime, for the sheer joy of

animal motion—dwelling happily in her thoughts on the present and its immediate surroundings. She had written upon a multitude of gaudy postal cards, and despatched them bristling with additional exclamation points. She felt triumphant, successful, equal to any emergency life might present.

It was her wit, she knew, that had inspired much of Arthur's career. It was her money that was giving him this opportunity; taking him away from the rigours of the American winter, that menaced his welfare, and affording him, beside climatic benefit, the mental tonic he needed for his literary work. She felt gloriously self-sufficient unto her own occasions this afternoon. She had been the dominant note in her husband's life and she had vanquished her own violent moment of wayward inclinations and turned its reactionary force to good account. Arthur was successful, well, happy—and he owed it to her. He owed his children to her—the little son and daughter over-seas. It was a record to be proud of. She smiled at the stranger children playing all about her, not so much from sympathy with their frolicking as from an overflowing self-delight; Arthur was her inner egoism!

Every one had been attracted to him and clung to him all the way. He won friends easily and held them without effort. Sometimes she wondered if there were not a hidden self deeper than even she could sound, a self she did not know in every detail of feeling. He was reticent—as all such frank people are when one goes far enough in their analysis. She sometimes wondered that he rarely, and never voluntarily, spoke of his only sister, whose

death had so nearly shattered him. His boyhood fancies or follies he had never mentioned to her. She had heard vaguely of a love affair with some remote cousin; it had made slight impression on her busy brain, crowded with ambitions and ideals for him, as well as theories to be worked out for his development. He never cared to talk about himself; concerning his work he would discuss every point with her at indefatigable length.

He was coming toward her now, and the stranger children, who already counted him their rightful property, lay in wait for him and threw themselves upon him with funny little foreign screams of welcome. He lived on the sunny surface even as they—they never saw his eyes when they did not sparkle; when the look of old remembered pain crept into them, which his wife did not like because it was not hers but inscrutably his own.

"Hans! Hans!" cried a distracted German nurse as a mite of a boy was caught up in Arthur's arms and swung deliriously in mid-air. "Your pardon, meine Dame, the little one is as if bewitched by the noble Herr," she apologised to Alice; then approaching the child said, "Komm, Liebchen——"

"Muss mann? Mann wunscht nicht——" sobbed the refractory baby, whose nurse, however, tore him away as a covey of bare-kneed French children surrounded Arthur clamouring excitedly, "Moi aussi, m'sieur! moi aussi!"

"What an epitome of life!" he said, ruefully looking after the little German,— "must man? Man wishes not!" Alice noticed then that he held a visiting card which he

now extended to her. She read it mechanically, quite unenlightened by the inscription, "Pierre Viernot."

"Who is it?" she enquired. "Do you know? Did he ask for me?"

"For us both: Monsieur and Madame Johnston, the boy said."

"I never heard of such a person——" she began doubtfully.

"Perhaps he married one of your school friends and has heard we are here," suggested Arthur, ready with his pleasant anticipation.

"None of my friends ever married foreigners, I am glad to say," she replied decidedly. "Did yours?"

A hint of that inscrutable expression darkened Arthur's face and passed before it was observed. "Yes; one," he replied indifferently; "but not of this name. It is probably a mistake. I will go and tell the waiter so——"

"No; let us go and see for ourselves," said Alice; and they crossed the terrace and wide piazza of the hotel, to enter the suite of drawing-rooms within. They found a most courteous Frenchman awaiting them—half deferential, half patronising. He remained standing after Alice bade him be seated, repeating with accompanying bows, "Bonjour, madame,—bonjour, m'sieur,—pardon, pardon if I déranger m'sieur et 'dame by my presence—if I take the too great liberty, madame will say me unhesitatingly that it is for me to go? Yes?"

"Oh, no; we were doing nothing important—nothing at all in fact," said Arthur encouragingly.

"Then, m'sieur, I take the liberty to invite m'sieur

et 'dame to accept my motor to Monte Carlo, to see there some old paintings and silver privately offered for sale. Myself, I am come in the representation of Aucassin, the art dealer so celebrated, who had recently the honour to confer with monsieur at Nice."

Arthur glanced at Alice, but she was enquiring more particularly into the nature of the exhibition. "We can go over some other day—it would not really be worth while to take your time," she said finally; "but we will take the address gladly." Arthur got out his pencil. "It would not be worth your while really," he echoed, "we enjoy beautiful things, of course, but we probably should not care to buy over here."

The Frenchman smiled with a whole aurora of enveloping warmth. "But not in the least, monsieur. It would be a pleasure only to show these treasures of art to persons so capable of appreciation! And pas possible for another to conduct m'sieur, as it is an opportunity known only in confidence to a few exclusive houses and private collectors,—the propriétaire being for the moment embarrassed and obliged to realise a certain sum. Aucassin—it is a house most serious. M'sieur," he added conclusively, "it offers only the exclusive opportunities to the patrons the most recherché!"

"Oh, well, when in Rome why not roam with the Romans?" cried Arthur gaily.

The afternoon was more than half over, so they allowed themselves to be overborne by the agent, who professed himself "enchanted" by the condescension, and were soon on the road to Monte Carlo.

The run is too familiar to bear re-telling, too widely famed to admit of fresh wreaths being cast upon its fabled charms. Amid the intricacies of double tram-tracks, motor cars, motor cycles, carriages, donkey-carts and heavy stone waggons dragged by four horses hitched tandem, the motor twisted in a life-and-death puzzle. Looking off over the harbour they beheld the beloved stars and stripes floating from an American yacht on the amicable French breeze; a little farther on they met the sullen coastguard winding down a sharp defile on their vicious looking horses. The sea was rolling in from Africa far below and the air was intoxicating with perfumes. The magician of all alchemies had assembled here in dazzling composition all the brilliant contradictions of nature.

“Heine would never have written

‘Ein fichten baum steht einsam,’

if he had known the Corniche!” cried Alice; here both pine and palm cut the soft sky in cameo outline.

The day was shortening as they sped through Monaco—that unique kingdom of all the world, a tiny strip of shore yet having its own law and preserving its own patois. The palace of the prince loomed against the sunset from its rocky bastion, on its own jutting promontory almost surrounded by the sea, and fantastically garlanded in tropical trees and vines that threw themselves headlong over the precipitous parapets, with the waves dashing to their destruction in a perfect fury of despair below.

Monte Carlo is even more thrilling, but with the beauty of a poisoned flower,—men have died of such! Here nature becomes theatrical, overdone—loses all wildness and plausibility to become melodramatic, overdrawn—almost haggard. All along the way lay villas half hidden by gardens or high walls—often wholly concealed and only hinted at by dim avenues of green, completely arched overhead and carpeted deep with ivy. Cactus plants ran riot here, like grotesque harlequins thrusting their striped arms in every direction, as if in mockery of their invasion amid the stately habitations of the aristocracy of Europe, or even of royalty itself.

“I must be dreaming, but I don’t wake up!” cried Alice, opening and shutting her eyes to experiment with the vision. Their appreciation was not exhausted by glimpses of the sea through olive groves or as a background for orange orchards full fruited, or vistas latticed with crimson roses, when the car stopped. But on stepping out upon the pavement no villa was visible; only a solid frontage of unbroken, uninteresting houses with shops in front of them.

The agent noticed their surprise. “After me, if you please,” he begged, still bowing. A little farther on they entered a narrow gateway that seemed to be going through a wall into a block set back and down from the street, but beyond which a path turned sharply. Following a winding curve around the building they descended rapidly by stone steps to a tiny garden overflowing with *réséda* and arbouré by *heliotrope* that almost met above their heads. It was far below the level of

the street, bending over the sea on the very edge of a cliff; Villa Réséda announced on the iron gate that barred the entrance. The gate, however, stood slightly ajar to-day, affording a direct access to porch and portico, suggestive of a relaxed vigilance within.

The bell sounded ghostly, as if it rang through an empty house. No life muffled the stroke, no voices interrupted its prolonged repetition. It was answered by an ordinary looking man, evidently a dealer, who bade them enter. They stepped down several steps into a square hall the floor of which was literally covered with books in rare bindings; French classics,—the modern poets, novelists, and philosophers jammed together in indiscriminate rows of Russia and crushed levant.

Alice was instantly for stooping over them, but the agent beckoned them on and they passed to a long room beyond, where the whole western end was a great mul-lioned window through which the roughening sea was angrily visible; the overcast sun making a steely line far out and leaving the light murky and threatening within the room. All around the wall and on the floor stood French paintings in double and triple rows. The dealer began to set them against chairs and from time to time fell back as if enraptured by their contemplation and forgetful of his mission. They presented a rather bizarre group of nymphs and satyrs, Venus, Orpheus, phantasies of meeting and parting,—the eternal boudoir scenes that abound in French art of all periods,—genre studies, and a few really fine portraits. The names of the modern salonists were for the most part conspicuous in the cor-

ners of the canvas. But Alice could not resist the reality of the sea outside to attend to them. The place was cold and the windy prospect cruel. The white waves were tumbling in ragged and torn, clamorous, beseeching—

“Madame does not care for the art?” insinuated the dealer. “But for the ameublement—is it not? Alors—regardez, madame!” As he spoke he threw open a door and revealed a typical boudoir, crowded with tapestry and gilt mirrors, Louis Quatorze, Louis Quinze and Empire all hurled miscellaneously together. A woman rose from a chaise longue near the windowed alcove where she seemed to have been engaged in sorting and burning old letters. She was still surrounded by many packages whose ribbons were yet unbroken—perhaps

“All that was left of a passionate hour,
All that the casual glance may see—
Faded lines of a dead desire—
All that is left between such as we!”

Her face was hard and indifferent enough, however, when the abashed agent cried, “But a thousand pardons! We intrude—pardon, madame, pardon!” as if quite overcome by his faux pas. The Frenchwoman raised a jewelled lorgnette and stared critically at Alice; at that moment Arthur joined them, and she let it drop. “Mais non; entrez, si vous voulez,” she said in a colourless voice, and continued her occupation.

Alice glanced hastily about the apartment and would have withdrawn at once, but the agent was volubly exposing a carved Spanish prie Dieu in the remotest corner and she was forced to listen and approach, while dramat-

ically and with melancholy fitness to the growing gloom the other woman continued at her desolate task. Alice's responsive imagination was already weaving details through the situation. So this was the home of one of those notorious daughters of joy,—those women who lived the ghastly life of afternoon. This confusion of the elegant and tawdry was probably typical of such a disordered life; this very room had perhaps been the scene of much that Dumas described, which would be revolting to her even to recall. Arthur was fascinated by the mirrors and was eagerly demanding if they also were for sale, interpreted by the alert agent who flitted from one to the other, intent on "making his affair."

"All, all for sale," drawled the owner calmly, raising her lashes for the first time since their entrance and giving Arthur an oblique glance from under them. He returned the glance in full. She arose slowly, and drawing him away, moved with him to the salon, speaking in broken English but with the most coquettish accent now, standing quite close to him and openly showing her susceptibility to his handsome face.

"Why does she sell her home?" asked Alice suddenly, interrupting the agent in his garrulous admiration of a candelabrum of solid gold representing a nude woman with a rose between her lips, as a suspicion of the truth came rushing over her.

"A sad history, madame; but malheureusement not extraordinary here. Her play has for some time been of the losing colour. She was such a fixture here at Monte Carlo—such an attraction, one may say—that the Bank

lent her money for a considerable time. But her living is trop de luxe,—voilà! ”—he called her attention to the priceless trifles on the toilet-table as he spoke,—“ it costs dear, madame! She has ruined more lovers than the fingers on both hands ”—spreading them before her and shutting them as he cried, “ Now—it is the end! A gay life, but a short one,” he added shrugging.

Alice felt a disgust beyond control. It was her first actual contact with the under side of society; it gave her a physical revulsion. She hardly glanced toward the silver displayed in the wainscoted dining-room, where she continued to imagine unspeakable orgies as having startled the night.

“ I have no need of silver,”—she said shortly, in reply to Arthur’s enthusiasm over a *répoussé* game set, gold lined, “ or Sèvres,” she added hastily, turning her back toward the glass doors behind which the tempting porcelain was displayed.

“ Madame is perhaps,—how does one say it in English? un peu bas bleu?” said the Frenchwoman, with an interrogative smile for Alice that somehow twisted itself into a genuine expression of pity as it reached Arthur, yet carried a covert sneer. “ It is with the books only that she engages herself?”

But Alice would not wait to examine even the books any further, though Arthur affectionately took up one after another and was loath to put them down. She would never need anything tangible to remind her of her first contact with vice in a woman—the creature’s intimate air with Arthur was complacently abominable. She did not

chatter with him now or motion with her too expressive hands, or even converse with him; but with each book he relinquished, her manner was one of sympathy with him against his wife's lack of comprehension. Alice grew increasingly indignant with Aucassin for sending them here, for subjecting a lady to so humiliatingly unpleasant a quarter of an hour.

"If madame cares for Lamartine—there is also here a copy in blue, the favourite colour of madame," suggested the French voice. "He is read by the English ladies even, and *très comme il faut*. There is also here even a sermon of the eminent Monsieur Bousset." This time her smile included both the dealer and Arthur.

"Thank you, I think not," said Alice, with forced civility.

"Why, Alice, I thought you adored Lamartine?" exclaimed Arthur, at loss to understand. "You certainly must have this by all means——"

"A little souvenir of the Villa Réséda? Yes?" The mockery of the voice was supreme.

"Not to-day," insisted Alice, putting it from her with a hand on the door. Arthur began to divine her displeasure. He turned to the Frenchwoman with double affability and a trifle apologetically,—feeling sorry for her and almost annoyed with Alice for a curt perversity so little like her.

"I won't stop to look them over now," he said; "perhaps another time. I thought they would please her——" he explained, with some confusion under the slow stare laid upon him.

"As you will, monsieur; I naturally assumed the ménage the same. *A la bonheur!*" with a smile under lowered lids. "When you will. It will be always a pleasure to receive you at some more favourable time."

It was only necessary to see her face to realise that the insult was studied and intentional. Alice's eyes were so blurred with tears that she stumbled going up the steps to the street, while Arthur, clumsily unaware of the gravity of his offence, was chatting interestedly with the agent as if to cover the pettishness of temper she had displayed.

"Where are we going now?" she asked, when, on reaching the street, they still continued in the direction away from the Casino.

"Only one instant's walk—to see the two celebrated paintings of Ingres of which I have spoken," begged the agent. "Not at such a villa—at which madame naturally feels herself to take exception—but at the private residence of a gentleman who sells from caprice only. One step, madame," he urged, as Alice was about to rebel. "Aucassin is a very serious house, madame, *je vous assure*; he is in the confidence of all the aristocracy, or as we say, *noblesse la plus en haut*—"

Arthur seemed compliant, and as she could not remain alone in the street, she mutely consented. They were soon ushered into a villa of far more stately pretensions, the white-haired butler of which regarded them disapprovingly, and disappeared—presumably to receive his orders.

They were no more than seated in the small reception-room where the butler had left them, when the hall-bell rang again and a woman entered. Alice distinctly heard her say in French, as she moved away, "Show only the two on the south wall"; but Arthur, at the sound of her voice, stepped deliberately out into the hall and was following her as she disappeared toward the distant stairway.

"Truth—why, Truth!" he cried in a low, suffocated sort of voice; "I thought you were in Egypt; why, isn't this wonderful?"

Turning for a moment she seemed to be about to deny his recognition with a forgetful stare.

"It is, but, yes, it is Monsieur Johnston, Arthur Johnston," she said, deliberately offering him her hand. "But why are you here and why are you not announced? You have been waiting? How long since you have arrived at Monte Carlo? How do you do? Your card was not presented to me,—I was wholly unprepared. François!"—in a reproving tone—"why was Monsieur not announced?"

The butler stood, a helpless image of remorse and indecision. Arthur came frankly to his rescue, explaining and mentioning Alice—leading the way back to her as he spoke.

"This is my old playfellow, Truth Saterlee," he said by way of introduction, entirely disregarding the agent's presence in his excitement. She greeted Alice not too effusively, and turned a critical glance upon the intruder, who was discreetly occupying himself with his note-book.

Hurriedly she conferred with him, in French always; then, as if remembering the Americans, "You had business with my husband?" she suggested.

The man bowed—did they exchange a flash of recognition? Alice thought it was so, but it passed unrecognised if they did.

"Monsieur le Comte had permitted us to infer there were in his disposition at present two paintings unworthy of his gallery, which he did not care to retain," he began carefully in English, as if to set himself right with his patrons.

"It is a mistake," she said coldly; "nothing here is for sale." He waited, but she did not vouchsafe him another word and he withdrew,—again bowing deferentially, murmuring merely: "M'sieur et 'dame will prefer naturally to return by train, as it grows late." Still bowing, still apologising for his intrusion, François showed him out and closed the door upon him.

The brief interval that followed was one of mutual exclamation and explanation. They were allowed to take their departure at last only after repeated promises of near and frequent reunion.

Alice did indeed prefer to return by train. She was a good deal what her countrywomen call "upset" by the varied experiences of the afternoon. She did not understand the machinations of the "very serious house of Aucassin"; it struck her rather as a trap laid cleverly enough to catch unwary foreigners. She was saddened by life as she had seen it in the last few hours and still a good deal hurt by that first woman's manner with

Arthur. Then, after it all, Arthur's astonished delight over the chance encounter with this playfellow of his boyhood, which had only too apparently lighted the torches of memory, to the temporary extinction of all nearer and later illuminations; even the flash-light at Cap Ferrat, which threw its greeting over the dark waters undismayed, after the comforting custom of inanimate cheer.

As for the mistress of the villa, left alone again, she mounted the winding stairway and stopped at the first mirror she encountered, gazing thoughtfully at the reflection in it. It was a French face; a complexion of porcelain, untinted, and distinguished from roses of artificial bloom by its transparent pallor; blue-black hair that grew back from the brow without need of recourse to curl or cushion, eyes like the changeful Mediterranean—looking forth at her now beneath the loftily arched eyebrows that gave the face its final delicate significance. It was the face not of the girl Truth; but of the Countess Vera de Hauteville. She smiled as she recalled that her voice had announced her unseen to Arthur Johnston's consciousness. Poor boy. How little he had changed, save for an increase of assurance and the portliness of prosperity. His old inability to conceal his feelings was the same—as was the light in his eyes that he never had learned to control.

She related the incident to her husband before dinner; it happened they were dining at home that night; alone save for Baron von Wreden the 'celloist, and Henri de Gaston, habitués of the villa. Later in the evening, as

Paul de Hauteville was leaving them to their music, he called her to him in the hallway where he stood ready to go out. The gardenia in the coat of his flawless evening dress was not more perfect than he—or more colourless. His dark hair grew low on his temples, his nostrils were as finely cut as the profile on an antique coin. Though the curve of his mouth was arrogant it never lost its expression of amiability, even when firmly set in some moment of stress or repression. His chin was clean shaven and his moustache, worn as France wears it, left the upper lip unconcealed as it lifted over his small but brilliant teeth. His grey eyes were dropped now, until their long black lashes lay against his cheek. Lifting them he smiled at her—a smile almost infantile in its youthfulness and insouciance.

“He is rich? Very rich,—your American?” he said affectionately. “And an old admirer? Courage, ma belle! Courage!” he repeated caressingly. “Tout va bien. To-night we shall win! For me it is always a favourable omen to make on Friday and by chance la rencontre.”

He stooped and breathed a light kiss on her corsage. She slipped back into the music-room, before Henri de Gaston, who was abstractedly playing chromatic thirds on the upper strings of his violin, had noticed her absence from the piano, where von Wreden was still laboriously tuning his 'cello from the middle A.

CHAPTER IV

CHIEFLY REMINISCENT

A SORCERER holds Monte Carlo in his hand: there is no god here but the perverse god of chance—chance that is blinder than love.

White butterflies wanton intoxicated over the heliotrope and pale roses of her velvet-turfed gardens, where colour miracles wrought by parterres of common flowers show astonishing and dazzling combinations—a sort of millennium of bloom for which all seasons have been laid under lavish contributions without reference to the recognised garden peerage. At the foot of tropical trees nestle mounds of cyclamen, white or crimson; ribbons of pansies arabesque the green in fanciful borders; rods of the staunch pink and white stock gilly defy every phase of weather from the opening of the season to its close. Yet with all the parade of beauty nature and art could squander here, Monte Carlo is an evil spot swung mid-air between the azure setting of the divine sea and sky.

In it no law will hinder—the ten commandments may be broken singly or in pairs at pleasure; but one must not commit suicide within the Casino limits—that luxury alone is *défendu*. The place has no more heart than a cactus; no more stability than the moods of the Mediterranean, the fickleness of which is the coastwise sailor's

proverb. The same villa that to-day excites the admiration of the passing show by its terraced palms, its shrouding roses or its prodigal hospitality, may to-morrow be no more than a background for the vast yellow affiche announcing it à vendre ou à louer. No explanation is given, none is asked. "The Rooms" hold the secret of all such transactions for their own. The horses of Son Altesse may stand to-morrow before the Café de Paris in a hackney coach. Often the driver of a one-horse fiacre will spread a coroneted rug over the knees of the tourist sightseer—it being cheaper for him to buy the fine belongings of the ruined aristocracy than the poorer grade of merchandise available to the purse of an humble cocher. Nothing seems to possess the quality of stability or permanence save "The Rooms." The world that frequents them is lacking in every element of repose. No comfortably indifferent married folk are in happy evidence. There is only the feverish fluttering of the wings of a transient passion too worthless to be dignified by the haughty name of love.

This passion or its semblance is here the supreme aim. The men of all ages seem to have cast off their stolidity or indifference and become young again and foolish,—nay more, amorous, ardent—

"The blood of youth burns not with such excess
As gravity's revolt to wantonness."

They look at women with intimate eyes; reserve is unknown. A faint semblance of universal honeymoon is lent to the atmosphere by jaded faces as Indian

summer ardours are responded to, permitted, or endured by their recipient, according to her satisfaction or agreement; yet even the mask of passion is prone to fall and the coquette become aware that while her transient adorer presses for further favour, more signal preference, his eyes may fall upon some newer, more audacious beauty that is to snare his light fancy,—or some young girl with modestly lowered lids whose power to stir him lies in her ignorance of all such as they!

It is a hard life, this gay round of sense and vanity—a hard life for women, where law, that friend of woman, is enforced only against suicide; where the obligations of marriage are subject to manifold permissible variations of lax construction. These men will return to their embowered châteaux or stately hôtels in the most exclusive faubourg of Paris, and perform as before the exemplary functions of husband and father; it is the woman who loses steadily and unflinchingly till the very end of the game; until suicide, which is forbidden, has become her only possible exit. Monte Carlo is off the world's surface in fact—a little nest of the devil hanging over the unappropriated sea. Man is here, as in a midsummer night's dream, cut loose from law, beyond the code of European convention. Every sort of adventurer abounds—his every counterpart adventuress. Grande-monde and demi-monde touch each other in public places, ignore each other, yet are the more closely woven for the contact in this strangely coloured fabric of restless life and pleasure called society. Sin flaunts itself so frankly here it is all but forgotten or overlooked. No

one cares to notice vice, and it escapes censure from its very lack of shame.

To Vera the comedy that went on about her meant no more than the breaking of the waves into flat wastes of foam-flecked fragments far below her villa on the cliff. Her life centred in Paul; expressed itself in her music. Children there were none, nor any longing for them; only an instinctive dread of any interest that might loosen the tension of the relation between Paul and herself. She had a morbid though unconfessed horror of the unattractive and painful—a distrust of any change in the tender despotism of their relation toward each other. She was aware of a preference that these Americans should not have impinged upon the harmony of their life by their unexpected presence, but she intended to be gracious and do everything possible to produce a charming impression upon them. For the sake of her foster-mother, who had been Arthur's own mother, she owed him much; and ingratitude was a banality of which she would never have been guilty.

In her girlhood Arthur's devotion to her had been an embarrassment. She had even delighted to hurt him and tease him, though her next caprice often singled him out for her highest mark of preference; rumour had coupled their names with increasing persistence as the years went on. Her ideal of a lover had been quite in the abstract in those days and distinctly removed from the college boy about whom no mystery clung and whose sweetness of temper was misconceived by her ignorance as weakness of character. Far from being her romantic ideal of a

hero, nevertheless, when her imagination craved material for its experiments, she had used him as a sort of convenient understudy and almost driven him out of his senses by her alternations of hot and cold.

"Jean says you have wonderful brown eyes," she had once remarked to him provokingly, looking at them as she spoke, as if it had never before occurred to her that he possessed even the ordinary means of vision.

"And what did you say?" he had asked, flushing from the great unexpectedness of such flattery.

"I said I liked grey eyes," had been her indifferent answer.

Her own were violet, as he knew quite too well. He remembered her as always rather listless, but electric withal, and very white—in spite of the contradiction of her soft dark hair and lashes. Her habit of silence implied a guarding of her own life and thought from surprise. He coveted prescience of her inner life, since knowledge of it was hidden in her reserve. She danced with him, sparred with him, flirted with him, rode with him, was often his comrade in holiday time, yet she never showed her heart to him or lost control of the "well-kept secret of herself."

When Paul de Hauteville came, this life-habit of withholding ceased. With him she was from the first as if set free from the power of a spell—even such as that of the nursery tale of the enchanted maiden in the sleeping garden. And he on his part forgot a certain Hélène, whose desertion of him for an older, richer lover was, perhaps, after all, no more than prudent for one of the

type of *la cigale*; and almost forgot what he owed her of actual obligation as well as of revenge and hatred. In short, it was good to be free—to be again his own master instead of the slave of a mistress, however generous and adorable. The one consecrated affection of his life had been given to his mother: like many Frenchmen he served her with the devotion of an idealist. Until her death and the first bewilderment consequent upon it, Héléne and her kind could never have touched his heart through mere appeal to his senses. It had all happened for the best. Apparently he married without a qualm of regret or a disquieting memory. Frenchmen are so. If in the last night of his bachelorhood, the last night legitimately his own, he had turned in retrospect to cold hearts hard won, tender half besought, to old nights of autumn over-seas, old faint-hearted tremours, spent delights; if the mood of “Kiss me, old memories! Love we have to-night,” had been his, Vera obtained no hint of its shadow in his urgency for their immediate marriage.

He was unaffectedly cordial in his attitude now toward this reunion of Vera with her American friends, after five years of separation in which she had not once evinced a desire to return to the associations of her girlhood. The opera for the next evening had been agreed upon as their first rendezvous. He looked forward to it with pleasure, holding Arthur Johnston always associated with the radiant hours of his first infatuation; nor had he any objection to the accompaniment of the presumably rich American wife. Vera had been able to supply few details of Arthur's marriage, which had closely followed her

own—closely enough in fact to have been accorded a momentary cynicism by her as to the *grande vitesse* of his consolation. But in spite of the handsome woman at his side—so undoubtedly his superior if not hers—something warned her instinctively that the boy and man were one and not wholly tamed.

Alice anticipated her first night at the opera here with calm pulses. She was a woman intrenched in the noble integrity of her own aims. The only shadow of a turning her life had ever met had been valiantly effaced even so lately as during these wander-days in France. It had all come upon her with bewildering suddenness, such natural inevitableness, during a visit paid in the country house of a friend where she had gone in search of utter rest; the only other guest being the husband's brother, recently bereft of his wife, a man whose wide knowledge of life and of the world of men and of books made his companionship an inspiration.

Afterward they used to call those gold and green days of their first meeting "the islands of afternoon." Not until afterward did they realise how isolating they had been—how isolated in their own enveloping currents of emotion. He was older and wiser, but a man whom convention only saved from being a sinner. His lonely abstinence from women's companionship had whetted his natural inclination. He was a scientist with half the letters of the alphabet trooping in distinguished file after his name; a member of England's most profound and royal societies of learning; and she was a clever woman. "Remember it is for always," he had said to her at the end

of the visit. And she had gone back to Arthur and the children with a brain full of new ideas and a heightened sense of the values of life all about her. His charm had a thousand resources. At long intervals they had exchanged letters, but so naturally, one appreciation of a book calling forth another, or a random sentence striking fire and bringing its retort, that it could not be called a correspondence.

"Like a rose in the arena your letter came," he wrote her from his desk piled high with grave affairs. Both lived more fully for the consciousness of a world shared by the other. So, for a year; then, the visit being repeated, proximity destroyed the illusions of bright friendliness. One glowing, gold-green, silent summer afternoon she realised that this man sitting by her side on the shaded lawn overlooking the peaceful hills was temptation visible. That he was a factor in the joy of life she had already grown dimly aware. He had made no secret of his devotion to their friendship; until to-day she had felt shielded in her gay assurance—a hint of wrong would have seemed a vulgarism befitting scorn.

He had stopped reading and their eyes met—a little as Francesca's may have met those of Paolo, perhaps.

"Sweet,"—he breathed—it was hardly so much as a whisper, "how did I live without your dear friendship? The days were as a *marche funébre*, before——"

Her fright was so overwhelming that she had remained perfectly calm—as some women do in face of great danger or great pain.

This, then, was temptation! Strange that it should ap-

pear in the guise of a friend! Here was no Mephistopheles in horns and scarlet cloak, no Démon drooping his sable wings in shame, but sheer simplicity, as when that fated glance of Francesca strayed from the book she read with Paolo, while artless and innocent the summer day closed in about them. All that poets had sung or theologians denounced under the vain deification of pleasure, or exorcised as sin, had taken human form, and in the semblance of a trusted friend made even the enjoyment of the hour in its flight fraught with ugly potentiality. Weighed in the exact scales of honour he had no right to be there and she had no right to be glad.

To recognise a temptation is for a normal soul to withstand it. It had seemed to her that there was room in her wide nature for both Arthur's life and his, but instinct, once aroused, waited for no second warning. Her self-reliant nature must henceforth forego the healing of those wider wings, and be itself both convert and flight for those who looked to her as she had unconsciously looked to him.

"Listen, my friend," she said quietly; "when the day comes that you become necessary to my life, I shall no longer see you. If the day comes," she continued steadily, "that I cannot get on without what your life gives to mine, I shall no longer write; it will be silence."

"And if you did this," had been his answer, "I should always know you were in the world. You would still cross my life as the life lines cross my palm, and be as present always with me!"



The silence thus imposed had fallen between them shortly after. That it had cost her something she was willing he should know. And the silence even had carried in it something of mutual confession—something of dependence that at first had been binding and solemn, but that had begun to grow irksome to her conscience; and yet she dared not break it. It had been almost a year now.

She had been strongly impelled to write him on the voyage: had, indeed, written a few lines each day which she had called "the log of my heart"; but it had fluttered over the side of the ship to the screaming of the Portsmouth gulls rather than into the wayworn mail-bag at last. It was strange to her how the leisure and the romantic surroundings over here recalled their talks—and not strange either, since his voice often sounded in her ears as he had lovingly described to her these very scenes, to him so familiar.

In him there had been nothing to arouse her governing faculty, nothing to demand the exercise of her careful and judicious management. At rest, she showed him a side unseen by Arthur, and in yielding to the superior will and mentality found a new emotion wholly pleasurable and untried. She relied on his dictation and followed the flights of his fancy, refreshed. As the lesser must always repose in the greater, her nature found haven in his. She felt it would have pauperised her mentally, in time, but for the moment it was both relaxation and stimulant.

The experience had come to her at a level in the way

that found her weary. It had offered a digression of colour amid the inventory of childish ills and the sharing of Arthur's life problems. It had given her that second bloom women sometimes reveal, born of a certainty of admiration—a consciousness that men still find their wit sparkling and their eyes bright—their charm undiminished, or rather increased. It fortified her amour propre that he should acknowledge her power and that she should have exerted it over him—she, the woman, his intellectual inferior. It put a younger spring in her step and an unenvying sympathy for all mankind and womankind in her heart, to remember that across the sea even now there was a man nobler and greater than his fellows who had accounted her friendship a dear privilege and its loss a lifelong privation. Regret is inevitably the price of memory!

On her own side there was no cause for compunction. She had been lacking in no motherly or wifely duty. She had never refused herself to church or community. She led and lifted and inspired; informed the clod with a soul in special cases; warned and made hopeful; created and creating in turn. Her activities had been as constant as her spirit was eager to perform. She was a woman who did,—tactfully but energetically. If it sometimes flashed across her that other women were ministered to, worshipped and set apart, she dismissed the thought as unworthy evidence of physical weariness. It was only the scientist with shrewd eyes for causal derivation who perceived in this unremitting activity the shadow of a heart too large to be filled by its normal oc-

cupants—a region left uninvaded by the love of husband and children, of whose possibility she was herself not vaguely aware.

An unexpected inheritance falling to her just as Arthur's increasingly overtaxed strength seemed exhausted and about to give way, had shown them their freedom, and made it possible for him to follow his chosen path of literature unhindered by conflicting vocations. Being ordered peremptorily to the south of France almost immediately after, the little son and daughter had been confided to a doting grandmother, and Alice suddenly confronted the long delayed opportunity for self-development and travel; though at the price of her separation from those little beings whose distance was to chasten the joy of leisure and heighten the sense of every league of sea or mile of country put between them. It was for Arthur; that eased the sacrifice. She hardly let him see the magnitude of her anxiety in her desire not to cloud his satisfaction. She had not faltered in her brave bright way, and much of her husband's success was due to her skilful manipulation of his talent and temperament. If within the velvet glove the sterner hand had sometimes made itself felt, it was only to fit its object to wrest his own victories from Life, the greater opponent, clad openly in hostile armour.

What Arthur ate, wore, wrote, said, felt, were forever ingrained deep in her own being, however busily she might seem preoccupied with her own womanly achievements. Every provision for his rest, welfare, or evolution was foreseen and supplied. In this her soul found

its own invigoration—as a sphere at rest only in its own perfected motion.

And Arthur? He accepted, effloresced, and was content in this increasing prosperity and the general joy of life; an easy optimist who would not see or did not see what alarms a less sanguine or more concentrated vision.

“You have made me very happy—these five years together,” had been his words in a burst of unusual feeling, one night at sea, as the ship ploughed the stars asunder in her midnight track into the unknown Forward!

“That has been my happiness,” had been her quick rejoinder. And it had not seemed to him inadequate.

CHAPTER V

“PETITS CHEVAUX”

THE curtain fell slowly on the second act of “Tristan,” and the lights leapt forth dazzlingly as the house rapidly emptied itself in a confusion of chatter and movement. Alice and Mary sat like statues, transfixed by the tragedy of the lovers whose music still subjugated their senses. They were aroused by Paul de Hauteville, who stood waiting for them to make their exit with the rest of the world. Arthur, noting their delay, beckoned hasteningly from the aisle, but Alice shook her head dreamily at him.

“You go,” she said to Mary Ingram, “I cannot leave the impression of the opera so abruptly.”

The girl rose reluctantly, and Comte de Hauteville, passing through the empty rows of seats in front of them, made a playful motion before their eyes as if to dispel a charm.

“Awake! ‘The dream is scattered into flight!’” he cried. “You shall find a drama no less striking awaiting your consideration outside.” Still she demurred. “It is the opera’s reason for being, here, to fill the rooms between the acts,” he explained, still smiling. “See, madame, in an instant more you will be quite deserted, with one very paralysed man and one little lame girl—whose attendant is even now coming to seek her!”

As he spoke the paralytic was lifted into a satin-lined

wheel-chair and rolled away to join the restless crowd outside. Alice yielded, though it broke the enchantment for her. They soon found themselves part of a gay group around Vera, near one of the great pillars of the grand foyer—which is, in reality, the universal salon of Europe.

They were presented carefully at first "after the manner 'Americaine,'" Vera declared, and Alice was soon chatting with Baron von Wreden, who alone of all the glittering company seemed aware of the magnificent performance they had just been witnessing.

Mary Ingram was staring unaffectedly about her under the instruction of Comte de Hauteville and Henri de Gaston, who in his turn stared at her serene young beauty, so out of place in this tarnished setting.

Vera, to whom Arthur Johnston was devoting himself exclusively, was constantly receiving greetings from those who passed, or turning to chat with those who stopped for a gay word or two spoken in the gracious, excitable French staccato, usually without pause for the significance of the equally rapid questioning in response. An old man, walking very stiffly and leaning upon the arm of a younger, approached and offered his homage in a few admiring sentences, leaving her with a bow that was none the less deferential for its haughtiness.

"Who is he?" whispered Mary Ingram.

"He looks like a Rembrandt portrait," Paul de Hauteville told her, and her eyes strayed after the two men as they moved away.

"The ex-vice-roy of Poland," she repeated; "and the other?"

"He is some distant connection of old Oulanoff—a Pole himself. He calls himself Wrenski; he is one of Vera's suite—you will meet many times."

"I don't know which looks the more interesting!" cried Alice, overhearing them. "Tell us something more about them."

"Nicolas Wrenski is something of a composer—unconfessed," said Paul, to whom their curiosity was inconceivable. "The old viceroy is a full-blooded Russian of course, a very honoured, very highly considered servant of the Tsar. If Holy Russia had more like him its title would be less a satiric contradiction than it is now. Is it not so, Henri?"

As Mary accepted his invitation to promenade Alice turned eagerly to de Gaston. "These people must all have unusual stories! How I should like to know all about them!" she exclaimed.

"Bien! If it were not that your language had of the diabolique difficulty, madame, I could relate to you many strange histories." He was warming to his task like a true Frenchman. "The faces of discontent are, many times, those of your American noblesse of the dollar—those women who never approach the real heart of society but never abandon the hope to arrive there par hasard. They are always en evidence; they return not to their husbands because they have always this hope—to enter the society here. The Germans you can perceive for yourself, it is not difficult—no? The Polish women are pale always, distinguées. The Austrians chic and more daring than the dames Françaises. The Rus-

sians you may find by their gems, beyond the mines of any but la Siberie to give up. The Italians chatter ever; the English are self-sufficient—it is they who stare about and regard all as if at a spectacle where they have paid for the entrée to amuse themselves as they choose——”

“Who is that worn-looking beauty with the high brow and weary eyes?”

Henri turned coolly, with no hint that his movement was inspired by her question. “That is none other than the Princess Carrassow, who made her escape from the harem of the Sultan, a relation by marriage,—and fled to Paris with only a maid in attendance about a year ago. Figure to yourself her romance!”

“And the girl in rose just passing on the left?”

“Fräulein Sellenbach. Her father was a general, one of the old Kaiser’s best. She inherits enormously from her mother and was badly compromised last season in consequence, by a Russian who desired to marry her from motives too well understood. Obtaining the certainty of her destination on her departure from Nice by bribing her femme de chambre, he surprised her en route. But en revanche, at the journey’s end—mon Dieu!—was also the general to offer him the choice of pistols or sabres! Magnifique! was it not, madame?”

Alice looked slightly bewildered. Just then a tall, strikingly blond woman entered from the terrace and walked gracefully through the foyer, as completely at ease as if in her own drawing-room. There was a young Englishman well under thirty in her wake. She was gowned to perfection, chic from her flowing lace skirts

to the knot of roses that, with a silver dragon-fly, composed her airy chapeau. She was gone long enough to have made or lost a few gold pieces inside, and then strolled slowly back again, ostensibly for a glass of liqueur at the buffet in the extreme end of the corridor, but this time she was accompanied in addition by none other than Colonel Lyndon-Carr.

Alice coloured with pleasure. Here at last was a familiar figure, high-bred, breezy, uncontaminated by the surroundings. She need no longer gape and stare like a country girl. She glanced up at him with genuine welcome, the next instant she was bowing cordially; and he had gone on without a hint of recognition. His frank face was a blank.

In her first hurt astonishment she explained to Henri de Gaston, who replied simply: "Ah, but that is La Chauncy, madame, with whom he promenades for the moment. He could not salute you in her company; it is not possible—not convenable, you comprehend." Alice's expression grew more rigid as he continued idly: "She was at first a dame bien placée,—Americaine, riche, belle—but she commenced to play. Then—" he shrugged one shoulder slightly. "She is well known here; she had, during the last season, her hand in the pocket of Lord Vernon; but now she has always an American or Englishman in her train—younger perhaps—certainly not wiser! She is not demi-mondaine yet, precisely,—you understand, madame? But she goes now with the current; one never salutes her in company with a lady."

Again she passed, this time languidly surveying them

with a supercilious stare. Alice suddenly felt homespun and out of place as she gazed after the tall figure in its Louis Quinze coat of pink brocade and shimmering white skirts, drifting so gracefully down the stream. She was sharply miserable lest their dear Mary be subjected to a similar discomfiture. Her own sense of values and their relations became heightened by the rebuff; she half hated to have Mary risk the shock of such a contact and half dreaded not to have her impressions of the English colonel corrected for her once for all by the standard of her own observation. Her presence suddenly became a responsibility,—instead of a mere happy companionship.

Henri de Gaston’s voice made no impression on her as he made his resumé of types: “It is the Pole who bears the finest jewels; as the Russian the most dazzling. The most gorgeous costumes are cocotte, and the most abominable, English!”

“It blinds me,” she said unsteadily. “This is the green-room of the world. There is not distance enough—the jewels and tinsel are too near—I can see the make-up—there is too little illusion—”

“How does it all amuse you, madame? You find it gay?”

“The surroundings—yes. The people very, very unsatisfactory,” said Alice thoughtfully. “Here as on the boulevards of Paris my birth is too much for me; leaving the sadness without the smile—the pity without the paint. They are not gay at heart,—I am afraid it is because they are not good.”

The Frenchman scrutinised her face curiously.

"Never before," he cried, "have I seen a woman at once so good and so gay! My sister is a religieuse, but always sad and sorrowful of spirit over the sins of the world!"

"If your morals make you dreary throw them away," quoted Alice, her eyes dancing at his confusion.

"But how drôle, originale!" he cried at last. "Come, madame, let us also go to visit the tables before the music summons us."

All their little party save Vera now moved beyond the doors of the gambling-rooms, where the allotted entrance of one detective for every nine souls illumines the social order of the gaming world better than any characterisation of mere words. The key to it all lies within—at the tables. They were filling fast and the monotonous voice of the dealer at *Trente et Quarante* was alternating with the equally colourless repetition of "*Rouge gagne,—Noir perds—*" "*Pair, impair*" or the endless repetition of the persistent invitation to make your bets—"Faites votre jeu!"

But the psychology of the place!

Could one ever forget the faces, the same when losing or winning; the tense nerves of the overwrought; the critical silence as the ball wavered once more between two numbers that meant hope or despair? All was in perfect taste here. The mural decorations were exquisite, the furnishings of a restrained elegance,—but the air was hectic and the atmosphere abnormal though so completely subdued. No one spoke loudly; no one laughed. Seriously they passed from table to table, no face betraying or voice uplifted to denounce or inter-

rupt the fate that dealt out disaster or good fortune alike, all unmoved. Some of the dealers seemed as blind as the three grim sisters up above, weaving or cutting the threads at random. Who were the players? Why did they play? What were their individual stakes? One became absorbed in questioning. One could stand for hours watching the game played openly between men and Chance,—man’s eternal adversary,—here narrowed down for critical analysis. Psychologically, it was just this open duel with Chance that first fascinated the daring; afterward the mere vulgar love of gain or excitement degraded him below the level of the real born gamester—degenerate though the latter be.

Here were the women-in-white, emerging from their romantic villas to gratify their thirst or need for play; here also were the fresh-faced youths of all nations getting a taste of life and liberty for the first time—losing sullenly until their means are exhausted. Occasionally the dull eye of the croupier, who sees nothing but knows everything, glanced for a moment toward a new-comer, and one felt instinctively that it was a first time for such a one, and that the expressionless croupier was measuring the stranger. He glanced so at Alice, at Mary, at Arthur; but not at Paul.

It is a place of undercurrents; of ebb-tides that turn not back with the turning of the night. Villas are bought and sold as the result of the little roulette ball’s aimless circling, and men go up or women down as the racing of the petits chevaux may indicate.

Especially astounding to the Americans to-night were the grey-haired women with sweet prayer-meeting faces,

modestly winning a few francs at a time. "They look like missionaries' wives!" exclaimed Alice.

"Perhaps they are," suggested Arthur. "They may have found Africa less attractive than its neighbour across the waves, and run over!"

"Oh, but no; certainly it is not so!" contradicted Henri de Gaston gravely. "They are always très occupées eating the cannibals chez elles."

"Missionaries don't eat cannibals, nor do their wives," Alice protested with equal gravity. "They convert them——"

"I make a fault through your language; but it is all the same. I know not the terms of the profession; but women are all cannibals, is it not, Monsieur Johnston?"

"I have been a minister's wife myself," announced Alice.

His eyes roved over her hair, her frock, and daintily gloved hands. "You do not resemble any I have seen—du tout, du tout! It is not your pose," he dissented with finality.

"And yours? You have left me to guess at your character. Count de Hauteville must tell me——"

"Hélas!" cried Paul, raising a deprecatory finger, and kissing the air lightly, with his eyes half closed. "Henri is elusive and perfidious—et puis, he escapes all my poor powers of delineation!"

When the warning bell reassembled the straying party he did not rejoin them. He had been unwearied in his attention, had explained graciously and professed no sur-

prise at their ignorance or fatigue under their questioning; but even for Vera he felt no farther sacrifice necessary.

“You will miss the music, Count de Hauteville!” Mary Ingram cautioned him, seeing him turn away, as if to leave the place instead of entering with them. She was immensely attracted by him already.

“The opera suffices until one has oneself tasted of life and love—as the shore suffices until one has pursued the mystery of space out upon the high seas,”—he replied rather enigmatically. “One must be young or old to listen only. The operas are all nothing more than love—differently presented. One tires of the amours of others—the more you live, mademoiselle, the less you will care to take the interpretation of *les autres*.”

And Mary was left wondering if that was true of her—if she had really never yet known life or love? Not as this man meant surely. She tried to put her own affairs aside, but the plaintive piping of the shepherd lad scanning the desolate sea for a sail in vain was weirdly echoed in her heart of doubt. It had not been a happy evening to her, despite all the causes that should naturally have made it so.

Meantime she had ceased to exist to Paul de Hauteville, who, beckoned by the “crooked fingers” of play, had disappeared behind the heavy hangings of “the rooms.” In the gambler by inheritance there is something as invincible as foreordination can make it. Like the colour of eyes or cut of feature it is a matter of birth; for which, although he is not responsible, his life is to be

held accountable to society. He may be convinced of the sin or the folly or the sheer waste of this his *métier*; he may even be brought tearfully to repent and promise that past indiscretions shall not repeat themselves under future temptations; but when the psychological moment arrives it will find him backing some horse, or laying his gold on some number devised by his cunningly contrived secret system, to extort success from even the unwilling Fates.

It is the deliberate facing of Chance that appeals to the true gambler who stops to investigate the reason of his passion. Loss or gain of common coin is secondary in his moment of challenging Fate, of meeting in voluntary duel the blind elements before which the world cowers in obsequious dread. The born gambler is no coward. He runs full tilt upon his ruin open-eyed and does not wait to be overtaken from behind or stabbed in the dark. He exults in the winning, but winning or losing he moves in the continual excitement he provides for himself, instead of patient expectation of the slow smile or reverse of fortune that time shall see fit ultimately to produce for him. He is the instrument of his own destiny, orders his own thrill, hurries his own blood. This love of play is different from the love of women—more clean and more heroic. It is more manly than a love of hunting, since no innocent wild thing is sacrificed in its lust.

Paul, whose inordinate love of gambling had been his bane his life long, preferred cards to racing, that only chance might participate, unbiassed by material consid-

erations of horseflesh or human trickery. He never played baccarat if there was a wheel running; since he argued that skill left chance handicapped, and to win became robbery, which was in no sense sport. His love of high play would have cancelled his career before this had not his inheritance been enormous, received through his mother, the daughter of one of the most famous banking houses in Germany. The rumour of some slur upon her birth had made him persona non grata in certain court circles early in his diplomatic career; he had resigned his commission in a smart regiment some years ago for the same unacknowledged reason and been content to drift along the upper surface of society; a member of many clubs and a prominent figure in many capitals.

Once he had disappeared for several months after notoriously high play at a certain well-known club; had been dropped for disregarding his debts of honour; but within a specified period his family was accredited with coming to his aid and he had as suddenly reappeared, discharging every obligation to the last centime, even insisting on paying interest due for the interval—a performance so unusual that he was enthusiastically reinstated. It was shortly after this episode that, breaking with all his previous traditions, he had been persuaded to go to America with a friend who was to marry an American heiress. On this expedition he had met and coveted Vera; and returned with her as his bride.

She had been a silent slip of a girl; always reading, yet with a quick tongue of her own and a wit sharp enough

under provocation. She had lived all her life in the family of her mother's favourite cousin, though the cousinship was a remote one; her own parents being lost to her in early childhood. The fascination of the foreign stranger, with his low, musical voice and enchanting worldly wisdom, was enough to have captivated a far more sophisticated maiden. He became the sun and moon and stars,—all her heavenly bodies in one,—the earth and its inhabitants falling away as she swept onward in her lover's eagerness to be united and gone.

The years that followed had been all novelty, and charm, for beyond the wonder of his companionship she had tasted the intoxication of travel; the languor of living in the amorous solitudes of the Orient with its perpetual 'call to love. For brief intervals they had returned to Paris for a dip in the life that both enjoyed the more by contrast with their roving interludes. For the last season they had installed themselves at Monte Carlo, where Vera's success had been instant as it was pronounced. Since their marriage he had forsaken all his old consorting, and though his path had perhaps been as devious as many another of his age and temperament, he had never loved any human creature save his dead mother and this silent American child. He wanted her to have all that the earth could give. It insulted him that another woman should boast anything she lacked. He was worried unduly as he remembered that for the moment he had not the money to secure the diamond chain he had ordered for her approaching birthday fête—unless his old luck held to-night. He idolised her: it

was a costly worship too; he had lost incredibly of late. He would not trust himself at baccarat with only a few thousand francs—that would be stupid folly. He would play first for nonsense with the crowd, until the turn of the wheel indicated the ascendance of his star once more.

He scarcely noticed the world about him as he seated himself. It was Chance he adored and with which he strove. He was often a phenomenal winner. To-night he lost—lost—lost. At last he had no more.

As he saw his last stake swept away from him, just as he was about to rise, he heard a low voice that he knew—one that he had known, rather—say “*Prenez, petit.*” A hand jewelled to the knuckles pushed a pile of gold nonchalantly toward him. He did not look up or speak, but drew the gold nearer; played and won; then won again.

As he pushed back the exact amount of the original pile, he lifted his eyes for the first time in the direction of the lender, saying simply in an undertone, “*Merci, Hélène,—once more you save me.*”

The woman smiled a triumphant smile. “It is not the guardian angel after all, but the guardian lover,” she whispered. “Tell me, do all your roads lead to Rome as ever, *méchant*? And your charming Vera? Is she with you still?”

Paul rose silently and left the table—this encounter had been to him as unexpected as it was undesired.

It was not Hélène, but the croupier who glanced after him—he had expected him to remain. As for Paul, the luck had turned—that was enough for to-night.

He met the others outside just as they were leaving the opera. Vera divined his satisfaction by the quiet of his manner, which was to her so much more convincing than his most painstaking gaiety. Until recently his love of play, so generally shared by his social equals, had never caused even an apprehension on her part. Of late trifles had seemed to point the wind's quarter as from less friendly ports than those of sultry Africa. Dimly the perception or omniscience of evil brooded on the un-
verdured peaks that rose uncompromisingly in threatening attitudes against the sky beyond—a shadow only, soon kissed away by the nearer glitter of worldly acclaim or passing pleasure.

If there was poison in the air, there were perfumes heavier still. If, as in some tropic jungle, even here there were evil things that slipped beneath the surface, invisible yet omnipresent, there were also lilies luminous above and birds of gaudy plumage amid the tangled branches, songless, equally silent, save when the rustle of a waving branch betrayed their leisurely flight.

If there was by day a glaring heat beyond suffrance, was there not also a spirit of healing, a damp and passionate darkness when the crimson hibiscus and the flaming purple bloom of nameless vines were forgotten, and only the lotus, wakeful, gave herself to the night?

CHAPTER VI

THE DIVINE MADNESS

THE season was at its height. The long salon de musique in the villa of the de Hautevilles was overflowing into the hall and glass-covered orangerie; even the smoking-room was thrown open, and invaded by men and women alike in the gay foreign fashion—the occasion being the fête in honour of Vera's birthday.

The most exclusive of the grande-monde of Monte Carlo and vicinity moved like a lustrous kaleidoscope from one variation to another, choicely set by the artistic background of soft hues of oriental tapestries, the perfectly diffused light from the clusters of crystal candelabra, and the groupings of exotic bloom and tropical foliage massed in a manner to relieve the eye from a monotony of glitter. The shadowless picture gallery, thrown open to give more space for the fête, revealed the master of the villa in his rôle of connoisseur, and many guests were availing themselves of the opportunity to view the famous Hauteville collection.

Mary Ingram, who had fallen an easy victim to Vera's charm at their first meeting, was realising that this was a very different scene and atmosphere from Washington at its brilliant best, and at the same time thanking her propitious stars that it was through her introduction that the presence there of Lady Kintore had been made

possible. She had not seen Colonel Lyndon-Carr yet, for his aunt had paid the initial visit alone—"warned in a dream" of their proximity, she had declared with roguish mystery. To-night she was no small contribution to the animated picture. She wore her long green velvet gown, cut low as Englishwomen will always dare, and a white fox boa falling over her stately shoulders to the floor in dazzling continuation of the colour scheme of her soft white hair piled high above her patrician brow. Her nephew had told her that she wore her trappings as advantageously as any charger on parade; for which she had given him one of her rare sweet smiles. Mary was proud of her and sat happily by her side, looking on at the shifting splendour about her, and hoping she had not seemed too shy and awkward in her somewhat strained reception of Colonel Lyndon-Carr's hasty greeting. She was glad he had not lingered with them there—she meant to be courteous but distant, to show him by her manner that there was no stress laid by her upon their previous acquaintance or its curt discontinuance. Still, the manner of his preoccupation a few evenings before at the Casino had been the first pang in her contact with the continental world; like all growing pains it had caused her a sharp sense of discomfort.

She had supposed there were unprincipled men in the world—naturally, since the plays one saw presented them—but not with frank honest faces and not among men one found in one's own intimate circle. Upon the inner nature of her accepted lover she had never been obliged to speculate; this new occupation led her afar into new

vistas of male perspective. She was glad when Lady Kintore met some of her own wide acquaintance, leaving her free from questioning to watch Vera, whom she considered beyond all the surpassing throng, alone and supreme. After the music began she was swiftly lost to all humanity. Lady Kintore on her part was rather relieved to turn to a more responsive audience for her sallies. She spoke German, French and Italian undauntedly, all with a heavy British accent, but with so thorough an understanding that her sentences carried home to the dull-est listener. She found a little difficulty in curbing her enjoyment, to silence during the first numbers of the informal programme, but when the hostess seated herself at the piano the warning hush that instantly fell upon the guests bespoke a critical moment in the interest of the evening.

Vera's playing was as odd as an artist's dancing: no less fanciful but infinitely more profound—spirituelle. She was rarely able to repeat herself, and insisted on the magnetism of her hearers as responsible for her sudden inspirations. Without Paul she would never attempt anything but ensemble, however much besought. She had chosen to-night to use for her unique performance some unpublished bits of Wrenski's composition, without his permission; a dance, a prelude, a song, a poem. The prelude was gusty and prepared them for any one of her unintelligible phases, but the dance that followed was as sad as the poem was fiery; the song was full of poetry and had a left hand refrain that was saved from the commonplace by its unusual form,—running up and turning

back before attainment, eternally denied its desire, like the tide; a broken melody that haunted the memory like the ghost of some measure full of the inexpressible despair of Joy withheld.

Few voices could surpass or equal her touch in its moving quality. Dramatic she was; wholly at ease. Armoured in Paul's glance her trance-like interpretation was above disturbance.

"C'est pas mal—votre composition," nodded the old viceroy to Wrenski, who assented inaudibly. "The poor lyre is nothing until breathed upon by Apollo."

"Wundershön!" sighed von Wreden, as if he spoke in a sanctuary. "Himmelische!"

"When she plays she is lost to us—where departs that speechless spirit?" murmured de Gaston to himself.

The pale face of Wrenski seemed to glow from the mere reflection of the light in his cold eyes as he approached her, but he only said, "A thousand thanks, madame." He was silent as Vera herself, brooding as brood the exiled Poles one meets everywhere in high-born continental circles. Alice had noticed him more than once already. He moved through all societies and public places as impersonally and seemingly as inevitably as air. If it would have been unnatural not to see him in the shadow of his box curtains at the opera or the classic concerts, the concert halls equally would have missed him,—though no soubrette, however audacious and persistent, ever won him to dance, and he remained exclusively fastidious—aloof—known a little to all, more to a very few, entirely by none.

When Vera finished playing, before she rose from the piano, her eyes had sought her husband as if for confirmation. He did not remark her swift glance, for he was at that moment, as it chanced, seating the old Baroness Baroch, who, being somewhat infirm, required a flattering amount of attention from the most desirable men present whenever she changed her corner; but later, when he summoned Vera to receive the dowager's fulsome compliments, he let her read his pride in the furore she had caused. He was never a lover in public, but now he allowed his glance to court hers, express the indefinitely intimate; and was gone leaving her radiant. Paul's praise was all to her. Henri and the Baron and Wrenski were only part of the scheme of puppets to contribute to the satisfactions of this one man, whose touch—or glance even—was fire to her excitable nerves, music-strung. On his part he was probably the recipient of countless advances in gallantry from the easily attracted sex, for whom no small share of his distinction lay in his indifference toward all save one.

Vera's music always made von Wreden hungry to play himself—whetted his appetite for expression. It was his way of throwing off the spell her playing invariably cast over him. He was tuning his 'cello—abstractedly, yet alive to any fall from pitch—

“Stehe still! Bleiben sie noch!” he warned her now, her fingers beginning to wander away from his keynote as he drew his strings a shade higher. “You can fly, you can run—but to walk or to march, can you never learn!” he cried despairingly, with a whack of his great bow

across the bass strings. "How shall you the moralist of music ever know? How shall you the mighty master Bach ever play?" he mourned.

"Perhaps I had better go away and permit some one else to accompany you?" she suggested playfully; as she always did when he scolded her in this way.

"Ach, nein! Unmögliche, my little Madame Vera. You shall to go from us not permitted be—my 'cello would now without you be lost—my understandings of your count already a long time since taken are; it is but that you are by the good God sent, to help me speak my loss and survive it by the friendship of your piano and noble heart with my beloved 'cello!"

"Monte Carlo is all music," said Alice, who was standing near them. "I never heard so much music in all my life as since I have been here!"

"Eben," assented von Wreden seriously. "Es gibt immer music, music, music, music! Dance hall, drink hall, concert, orchestra, opera—es ist immer zu haben—but for you now I shall the music for the heart make—if the little Vera here helps me?" he added, nodding to her over his 'cello to begin; "das beste solte das liebste sein!"

They played Chopin's 'cello sonata in B flat, the largo of which seems an invitation far beneath the sea,—the sea with all her buried mysteries and "fair dead drowned things."

"She plays Chopin like a homesick Pole," was Wrenski's comment.

"Ach!" cried von Wreden's good wife, "he is even now with our lost Hulda conversing. It is truly ever so

with him when he plays as to the angels of heaven!" She wiped her eyes undismayed by the unchecked tears that fell on her massive bosom.

"How wonderful it must be to compose music!" said Alice to Wrenski, standing near.

"How greater to interpret!" he replied. "Chopin's angel depends upon the power of the living for resurrection. It is dead without such as they to call it forth. As Heine said, Chopin is the true tone poet!"

No theme but Chopin could have drawn him from his habitual silence.

Some Tschaikowsky followed, rich in its shadow of the Slav; but it was in Schumann that the German was a boy at home again after sad adventuring—happy in the familiar chords and close harmonies each page recalled. Schumann was to him at every phrase like the remembered sunlight at familiar angles on beloved scenes of chastened memory.

Henri de Gaston's violin joined them for a Rubenstein trio that seemed instantly to fill the salon with the curving flight of joyous summer birds, one following another against a sky of perpetual azure—mating, warbling, darting through green foliage to reappear higher against the zenith, soaring silent, ecstatically alone and free.

"De Gaston's music contributes a very desirable lightness and joy," said Paul to Alice. "I have heard him play when it suggested the beat of centaur hoofs on a mountainside; in his playing there is always a fantastic element; it is mythical, full of strange exquisite throbs and inhuman unmoral cadences; full of the loves of

Circe, of Arcadian festivals and pagan rites. Without him Vera and old von Wreden would strain the appreciative amiability of their audience to breaking."

Arthur's handsome face was not wearing its usual expression. He was conscious of an annoyance for which he could find no cause, except that he had somehow lost the clew to his surroundings. It was new to him to be overlooked, to be simply contributing by his uncounted presence to the impersonal success of the evening. He watched Vera constantly, the look of discontent deepening to one of something less than pique but still of a distinct dissatisfaction. He felt almost hurt. He could not himself have explained why.

"Do you remember how I used to tease you about fighting an *étude*?" he asked her in his first opportunity for an aside, reminding her playfully of an early incident, as if to recall himself more sharply to her drifting memory. "How the birds used to sing on those spring mornings! I liked it better than the way you play now,— this sounds as if you were not happy," he added, colouring. She had always made a boy of him, and that old annoyance returned to cover him with confusion.

Vera was a silent woman, though vibrant and high-strung. She never helped the social flounderer. She merely waited and looked at him as if interested in some acrobatic performance going on quite outside her world. That was the unsympathetic side of her nature, or the side that was accounted for by her own acute sensitiveness to ridicule, and contempt for that sensitiveness in

others. Before she had answered Arthur they were all about her again, entreating her now to recite to her own piano accompaniment and de Gaston's violin obligato. She seemed to shrink from it, though this odd recitative of hers in harmonious monotone was her chosen expression, her most intense pleasure.

"Not to-night, please," her smile was for retreat. "It is not suited for so large a company perhaps? It is a little ghostly——" her eyes were on Paul, who commended openly.

"Your American friends must not feel themselves condemned to ennui. We must amuse them not solely by tears!" he said gayly. But already Henri, bending over his violin till his lips almost touched the strings, had struck the preluding chords. Prince Nicolieff offered his arm with ceremony to Vera. Wafted on the praise of the eager company she allowed herself to be led back to the piano.

Alice and Arthur stood together in a window recess, from which the midnight Mediterranean was visibly rocking in the moonlight, cradling the stars,—but neither regarded the wonder of Nature or welcomed her calm, for the man's soul knew only the dictation of the voice that was mortally wounding him with every breath—and the wife seeing his face saw nothing more.

The poem they had been asked to give has for its subject the poet in his garret alone, starving. Some one knocks. "Who is there?" he demands. The dialogue begins, "Is it fame?" "Is it love?" "Is it despair?" "No; it is Death."

Vera's tragic voice in key and rhythm but not in tune with the accompaniment was now demanding: "Qui frappe à ma porte?"

A few coldly significant lines followed, explaining that hunger stood outside. The poet without accompaniment depicts his solitude, his despair. Piano and violin repeat the melancholy burden.

When Love in turn announced itself "C'est moi—c'est l'amour!" Vera's voice was but a thrilling thread, scarcely audible save to a sense beyond normal hearing. Then, then,—Henri's violin was liberated and insinuated and caressed and stunned by its all-powerful seduction; but no, in vain!

Again the resisting voice demanded, "Qui frappe à ma porte?" Surely this time it was fame! Hope revived; but a fatal vibrant answer chilled the blood of all who heard—

"C'est moi,—c'est la Mort." It was over. There was no display of reaction by either as Henri laid down his violin and Vera moved slowly away from him. Each knew how racking their performance had been to the other, to temperaments as easily capable of transmigration as theirs.

Vera had been actually the starving poet in his last hallucination, had clamoured for fame and love, and had only opened the door at last to death. Oh, it was no acting on her part! For the moment she had become the creature of her own artistic creation. Henri had gone with her,—he could not recall himself as easily to the real world about him. He slipped away now to the dining-

room and poured himself a glass of cognac. On his return he met Arthur Johnston moodily standing in the doorway, deep in his own indecisions.

"Bonsoir, monsieur! You are Monsieur Johnston, the almost-brother of Madame la Comtesse, is it not?" he said graciously, dismissing his own emotions with the ease of a Frenchman.

"Will you not also perhaps drink a petit verre of the cognac? And after we can talk a little together—at least if my poor English will permit?"

Arthur followed him and soon in his turn was asking questions. "You play often with her? You think her an artist?" he said, indicating Vera through the open doorway.

"Many, many times. But always with Baron von Wreden," he added hastily, "never without him; because to do that—it is scarcely convenable—you understand? Though Paul de Hauteville remembers that she is not of the Europeans and has himself no desire to restrain her within the barricade of our continental prejudice. It is not really dangerous for her to receive alone; but it is not desirable naturally—she does not, however, make the attempt. She is 'comme il faut' to desperation!"

Arthur Johnston sniffed disdainfully. "Dangerous? Well, no; I should suppose not!" he exclaimed. "According to your code if Saint Paul had been a Frenchman he would have said all things are lawful but not all things are convenable!"

"You are not well, my dear Monsieur Johnston?"

cried Henri sympathetically. "You are 'souffrant' and you try to conceal it! Your face betrays it—tell me how it is possible for me to serve you?"

Arthur stared blankly down into his glass. It seemed to him that Vera could not be happy. Happy women did not play like that—did not open the door to death with such abandonment. They did not do anything; they were happy and accepted happiness as the end of their being—happiness and their children. Should he try to draw a hint of her life here from this ingenuous Frenchman? He ventured a shadow of his thought tentatively. Henri agreed with him in general. Becoming anxiously concrete, he demanded, in spite of his better judgment: "But you think she is happy, don't you?"

Henri flicked an ash off his cigarette before he answered, the action apparently delaying his response rather than need for second thought.

"Happiness is something of an Americanism, is it not?" he asked in return. "We do not place so much of confidence in it as a subject *au fond*. The woman who loves or is not loved or who loves and fears to lose her empire, her sovereignty—hers is the kingdom of art. Happiness—it is a little bourgeois, is it not? Pardon me, *cher monsieur*, if it appears to us not a thing for souls the most elevated."

Arthur's displeasure increased momentarily, as the man went on: "Our poet Prudhomme has said, to be silent is yet—to lie a little! Madame la Comtesse puts all she may not say into her music. By it also she holds M. le Comte. She understands well that it is by the flattery one leads a man to the last limit, if to it a woman

wishes to condescend; but on the other hand, he knows it as well. It involves the caution, the extreme delicatessen. Par exemple it flatters and fascinates him that all the world knows well that she cannot play when he is not beside her. Alors,—not she, but he, is responsible for her power: and after that she is not to be heard beyond the doors of his villa. You see? It is the master and slave. Chimère éternelle—bête éternelle—comme vous voulez!”

“You think, then, that she is not absolutely happy; you imply that she is in love——”

“Mais certainement! Comme une folle!” cried Henri, paling perceptibly as he said it.

“That is a horrible admission,—and with whom? It is known? Spoken of?”

“She is very discreet; you would imagine nothing of it; never! Her manner is the perfection of indulgent indifference; but, mon ami, wait—you have never seen her alone with him—it is then the petite Vera becomes a Frenchwoman, half diablèsse, half angel—wholly——.” He added a word in French incomprehensible and unfamiliar. Arthur’s bewilderment was increasing.

“I don’t understand you at all, or your estimate of the Comtesse de Hauteville’s character,” he said coldly. “To whom do you refer as the object of her unfortunate passion?”

“But surely, it is Paul! She is still mad over him, Rostand au contraire, who said, ‘Un mari c’est pas un amant.’”

“And he?”

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"He is a man *comme il faut*, très gentil," Henri shrugged insinuatingly; "but *ma foi!* not a man to remain eternally the same! No one is, who plays. Love of chance, it goes to become too strong for such as he, it flows in his blood."

Arthur received his second shock.

"Paul is too sure of her," continued Henri, warming to his task. Usually he would not have discussed Vera with any living soul, but to-night with this "almost-brother" it was a physical release for his cramped emotion to talk openly of her, to lash his own weakness under cover of unveiling the weakness of another. "But yes; he is too sure," he repeated again. "He rests content that she will never abandon him, or make for him the scandal as did Héléne during past years in Paris. Ah, oui, sans doute il aime," he said to himself in French, "but not as she loves, because——" he concluded aloud in English, "if it were so she could not play as she does now. It is only the great passion that can create art in a woman,—and she has more than the talent *extraordinaire*; but the *ivresse*, that of her playing which seems to you genius, is really Paul. Paul and her moods about Paul."

"If she had a child——" began Arthur.

"It would find itself *de trop!*" cried de Gaston.

Meantime, Alice had been presented to the viceroy and was chatting easily with him of the town and its amusements while he watched her, indolently as old men will, waiting for a word or sign of something diverting that he had not heard repeated countless times

before. He was evidently entertained by her unspoiled observations, for he was inviting her to his villa for déjeuner and promising to show her there his collection of malachite, unlike the fragments of that marvellous mineral that had previously excited her admiration. Occasionally his eyes wandered toward Wrenski as if curious concerning his opinion of these intrepid Americans, but it was de Gaston who, noticing the signal, relieved the situation from a possibility of ennui.

"And you, Madame Johnston, you will also play for us?" he begged persuasively. She made a smiling dissent, rueful yet with matronly satisfaction. "I have not practised since I was married! I used to play. We all learn up to a certain point and then drop it—there is no time."

"But how do you amuse yourself?"

"We have clubs. We study and write papers and discuss events,—beside the ordinary social round." Henri looked absorbed.

"Charming, enchanting—this club of women. It is like the movement *feministe* in France, I understand; yes? I have never before considered so at hand a member of this so unique a body!"

"That is not all her life; she makes me very happy beside," said Arthur, who had followed him at a little distance.

Henri adjusted his pince-nez. "Eh bien! And the Comtesse Vera here, like a true Frenchwoman, makes us all very unhappy! There is the difference! How it is amusing to be so dedicated, so foreseen, one may

say,—so little left to chance! Madame Johnston is supreme, bien sûr.”

“You have never known much about our women?” asked Alice, detecting his ill-disguised contempt.

“Until the present almost nothing. I had before but one acquaintance of America. He was from some Indian State. He made me an expression concerning his wife so drôle I was never able to forget it. I made my compliments on the courage, the esprit of his wife, and he made me the repartée, ‘My wife? Oh, yes, in our family she carries the whip!’ I do not know how to express it in English, but in French it is très drôle. Perhaps of a little complication, but of a naïveté charmante!” He laughed infectiously, but Alice was annoyed and showed it; while Arthur exploded with his merry laugh, echoing oddly enough above the conventional tones of the salon.

“He made also another phrase plein d’esprit,” said Henri, encouraged. “He cried at me with a frequency, ‘You bet my life!’ I found him of an argot incomparable.”

Mary Ingram had come back to earth less rapidly than the rest; Wrenski was watching her intently while he passed from group to group in his silent way.

“Is she not wonderful?” Mary said a second time to Lady Kintore, as Vera, turning from a florid Albanian prince in gorgeous uniform and a pale duke of Lithuania in evening dress covered with decorations, who were both claiming her attention, stood listen-

ing to some passing remark Paul had offered her, her clinging robe of silver heightening her impression of unreality.

"She is quite an actress," agreed Lady Kintore, dropping her lorgnette, as if her mind were for ever made up on that subject.

"I have no talents," sighed Mary, looking down at useless hands that wrought no such miracles of tone.

"I should say it was quite as well!" cried Lady Kintore heartily. "It is unfortunate for a girl to attract attention, isn't it? Do you know," she added, with a turn of British frankness, "I don't care for your friend Madame de Hauteville. You fancied I should, didn't you?"

Mary's sweet eyes clouded with sincere disappointment. "I surely did not think you would tell me so, if you did not," she said slowly, hardly aware of her reproof. Mary's candour was less premeditated than that of the Englishwoman, but it was none the less disconcerting in its way. "I think she looks like a daughter of the moon," she insisted, never taking her eyes from Vera.

"Oh, rather not! I should say she was born under a conjunction of planets,—a double constellation," cried Lady Kintore. "I should uncommonly like to read her hand. I went in for palmistry a bit in the East once."

"I suppose they know all about such things in Egypt," ventured Mary vaguely.

"Oh, I should say! But India is the home of the occult. Mysticism is all about one there. It is not easy to escape its influence; Buddhism, esoterics of all sorts, science and religions combined. The Orientals are an awfully superstitious lot.

"How I wish you and Comte de Hauteville could talk together!" exclaimed Mary. "He knows all about signs and auguries. I think he believes in them too. To some extent, that is——"

"I should like to read his palm," admitted Lady Kintore, her old eyes brightening.

"Let us ask him," said Mary. She repeated their words to Paul, who, with Colonel Lyndon-Carr, had come to offer them the allurements of a late supper.

Paul's first answer was to close his hand gaily as if in mock secrecy: "Ah, madame la generale, you are shameless; you are asking me to part with a man's last treasure," he deprecated. "But I recognise the gift of Delilah and the fate of Samson. I keep my power."

"I will exchange," she offered, archly extending her own hands, their handsome palms impulsively denuded of gloves.

But he only laid his own upon his heart with mingled deliberation and chivalry, as he replied, "I have never before, madame la generale, regretted being no longer free to accept the offer of a lady's hand," and so left her.

"He is unnecessarily handsome, and I suspect he is

very clever," said the old woman, her shrewd eyes following him.

"He must be, or Vera would not be so happy with him," said Mary.

"Does a chap have to be clever to make a girl happy?" queried Colonel Lyndon-Carr. He took his aunt's place as she accepted an escort for the supper-room, leaving Mary unprotected from this precise situation for the first time during the entire evening.

"It is music that makes a girl happiest, don't you think so, Baron von Wreden?" she said, involving the big German, whom she trusted instinctively, in her conversation, and turning to him for covert from the impending tête-à-tête. "When you were playing it all seemed like a beautiful vision," she went on with nervous eagerness, as if to prevent him from slipping away. "I forgot how stormy and mutinous was the voyage that brought me to this island of enchantment, and my white ship of dreams has no desire to set sail again."

Von Wreden turned to her gently as if she were his lost mädchen again before him. "When a little boat like yours from the shore puts out, it should ever the Lorelei not forget!" he warned carefully in English, glancing at Colonel Lyndon-Carr's handsome face; but the latter cut him short in his sentimentalising, by drawing her hand within his arm, and literally hustling her off into a still more secluded spot for a long course of intricate gastronomics, varied by bursts of self-revelation.

Alice, watchful from afar, noted the return of her

contagious rippling smile. Arthur passing her, an empty glass in hand, nodded approvingly as he cried, "You won't have to coach him on American institutions after all! He is getting along fairly well as it is." Henri de Gaston smiled back at her openly.

"One must; it is necessary, one knows not why," he explained apologetically to Alice, in extenuation of the liberty he had taken.

"Of course! Mary's smile would make a felon of a hypochondriac, if it were against the law to smile back," she cried. Her own eyes danced as if she enjoyed the havoc so plainly being made of the Englishman's susceptibilities, as betrayed by his eloquent colour.

When the last guest had taken a lingering farewell, the last hand had been duly kissed, and the lights were twinkling into darkness, Paul was in Vera's boudoir—the last triumph of her triumphant night.

"How they burn!" he said, as his finely moulded hands unclasped the diamond chain from about her neck. He kissed the bare throat completely around, murmuring, "Comme tu es belle! Comme je t'adore!" He held her a little away from him as he studied the beauty of her white flesh and slender outline. "You are more beautiful than any jewel, it was a mistake to cover ever so little of your perfection!" He kissed her shoulder lightly as a hovering moth might touch a flower.

"I shall never wear it again," she said very low, putting the gems from her. "I feel the kisses burn hotter than any diamonds,—I shall feel myself forever radiant so! In them only——"

“Spirit of flame!” he whispered, drawing her to him. She was habitually so cold that the sudden flash of heat unmanned him. Héléne had never moved him so, even in his first youth.

When the long moments of silent ecstasy were passed it left them wistful, spent—baffled in the interminable effort to merge two beings in one. For them the universe had sunk away in the sweet darkness of their embrace; yet the chagrin of continued existence claimed them at last. When they had recovered themselves and their surroundings, Vera asked, after a little, wishing to recall him to the glories of the evening and its probable effect upon her compatriots, “How did they impress you, Paul?”

“Me? I do not remember,” he answered dreamily.

“The wife has wonderful hair and eyes——”

“Vera has the only wonderful hair, the only mysterious eyes——”

“The little girl, Mary, is very sweet——”

“Vera is sweetest always——” he interrupted. How often she had told him if he were only aware of other women there would be more value in holding him captive—that he despoiled her of her triumph by his indifference to others! The music was still in his blood, he would have taken her again in his arms but she held him from her, saying suspiciously, “You are not gay to-night, Paul,” laying her fingers on his lips. “Do not dispute me! Something troubles you, chéri; is it money?” she asked.

He kissed the hand that silenced him. “I am jealous of your American admirer,” he said solemnly.

She gave him a droll smile. "And I only of your play. What if you were to play too much, *chéri*, and fortune, being only a woman, should not prove always kind?"

"Is it that my wife denies that another woman would be kind toward me?" He made a pretext of vexation and disbelief.

Vera shook her head fondly. "Fortune may be faithful; but take care!"

"You dare to think she will desert me for the beaux yeux of your American?"

"Arthur does not play. Don't teach him how, Paul; it would not be fair." He walked to the window. Drawing back the hangings, he looked off over the blur of sea and sky.

"C'est juste, Vera. I am not absolutely myself tonight; but it is nothing—at most a premonition only, a mere *soupçon* after all—it will pass——"

"You put a foolish confidence in these presentiments of yours," said Vera quietly. "They vanish with a night, but you allow them to influence you. I am really afraid that we are spending too much, though; I do not need half the lovely priceless gifts you give me,—jewels do not make such happiness——" Her face was very lovely, very beseeching.

"You need all and more than any man can ever hope to give you!" cried Paul, overcome by the swift remembrance of her success with even the most envious tongues, the nearness of her beauty, and the sure nameless charm of her that no man could ever wholly

resist. "There is no one in the world but you who ought to have anything, until you are tired of it! See, my *bien aimée*, already the shadow is gone!" he cried, pointing to the distance, where the first faint flush of dawn was appearing as if to make visible the last morning dream of the night. Again he drew her silently to him and again she gave herself unresisting to his embrace.

CHAPTER VII

DÉJEUNER WITH THE VICEROY

YOU should get a wavy frock or two right away, dear," said Arthur abruptly a few days later. "The limp clinging kind they wear over here—not quite so stiff, you know. They all seem to wear bigger hats, too, with more feathers falling off behind."

Alice, standing before the long deceitful French mirror, lifted her hand-glass and surveyed her own high figure, with its flatteringly small waist and rather hard surface, uncritically. It was true; she did present an unyielding appearance among these French dolls, whose contours suggested unresisting softness. It was equally true that nothing was left to entice the imagination in her own gowns; they were painstakingly correct in cut and too exactly matched in hue of fabric and trimming. No laces drooped, no scarfs depended, or loose waves flowed about her in superfluous draperies, or lay in pools of graceful though unnecessary folds upon the floor in front of her, or wound in sinuous coils about her feet. Bust, hips, neck, all were fitted sharply and somewhat trimly. She was not guilty of the vulgarity of mere tightness, but she did not wear creations with a haze of mystery as to where they hooked or how she was melted into them. Her dressing was too apparent. It hinted no poetic sub-

tleties, concealed no artful meanings, as Arthur dimly perceived, through man's vague æsthetic sense, without being gifted enough to formulate the hidden reason. That he had not said, "You ought to get a frock or two like Vera's," was a hair-breadth and merciful marital escape!

Alice, a little hurt as it was, quickly recovered herself. It was charming of Arthur to wish her to indulge herself. She resolved to think only of the suggestion from this amiable point of view. "I was just going out to buy a hat," she said cordially, having finished her survey of herself. "That seems to be more important than brains or character over here. Mary is writing home, so you may come with me if you like; I am sure I shall need all the help I can get!"

"We shall get along perfectly," he assured her, hunting for stick and gloves, which he made a point of hiding—to outwit the hotel valet, who persisted in putting them properly away where he never could find them. "If they try to impose on you I shall draw myself up to my manly free-born American six feet and say, 'Quoth the raven nevermore!' They will feel the chill in that even if they lose the point of what it is about."

"*Chez Gervaise*" was the name on the door, in gilt letters, set sideways. Alice tried on hat after hat under a running fire of comment from Arthur, upon whom the French saleswoman turned an ingenuously susceptible gaze with each new experiment.

"Take it off! It looks like the lady that rides the elephant. This one would do for light trapeze work! That

one reminds me of the chorus lady! Wait a minute—wait a minute! This one is fairly stunning! Now you are hitting it!”

It was a large black hat looping away over her massive hair, nothing of importance happening to it in front, but becoming very eventful in the rear. The Frenchwoman stood off and half shut her eyes. “I find it ravissant upon madame,” she decreed at last, “but—but—” ah, what a world of disconcerting reluctance she threw into that obstructing monosyllable! “No, no; one flower too much. Just here,” she declared with a resolute mouth and lifted eyebrow.

Alice looked helplessly over the tangles of artificial bloom labelled theatre hats, representing every exaggeration of style, and aviaries of bird-of-paradise tails considered suitable for more normal headwear. The girl swept them aside, saying, “I, too, find them something,—all hitherto, too light for the style of madame,—they lack the massive,—the, as one says, the *caractère*.”

As they stood watching her deft fingers replace the erring flower at the desirable angle, Vera de Hauteville entered the shop upon some errand.

Arthur blushed furiously. She saw it as she cried, “Ah, la mari s’amuse!” shaking her finger at them. “But what extravagance!” indicating the discarded hats with a grimace. As the girl approached again, she left them with a few more words of parting caution.

“If madame will be so kind?” The saleswoman held back a velvet curtain, motioning them to pass with her to an inner sanctuary. Here Alice was seated before an-

other glass and again the black "cavalier" was mounted upon her black hair, a long dotted veil draped over her sweeping lashes, the *vrai touche d'artiste* given her handsome head that was by nature as glossy as that of a pretty colt in the pasture.

The attendant clasped her hands in silence as if overcome. "Gervaise himself must to behold!" she cried as if venturing an audacious stroke that might cost her dear. She vanished and swiftly returned with the *propriétaire*. He glanced first with becoming *hauteur* at the group before him, then allowed his eyes to rest as if fascinated upon the picture presented to him by Alice and his "cavalier." His manner expressed approbation in spite of accustomed conviction.

"Monsieur finds that it is gentil, parfait?" begged the girl, timidly, yet with assurance.

"Rien à dire," said the great artist, with a bow that included them and the hat and the girl as a true prophet of his creation—and himself as the creator of it all.

Oddly enough until they were giving the address they had forgotten to enquire the price.

"It is not dear," murmured the girl indifferently, "not dear for a chapeau so chic—only fifty dollar-r-r-s," she announced gaily at last after a vain search for the mark. Arthur contained himself with difficulty, but as a man will before a saleswoman, from a sort of fierce male pride; but Alice dropped her silver shopping-bag to the floor with a clatter.

"That is ridiculous!" she cried. "Look again." The girl's face continued to regard it all as a mere pleasantry

Americaine. She continued to smile without speaking, as if playing a well-known rôle in some gay little farce.

"Is that really your last price?" begged Alice weakly.

"Dernier prix, madame," she replied, becoming suddenly grave. "This is a very serious house, madame. Also it is race week—et puis; Gervaise makes never the two models of the same effect. Even in Paris madame can not find such a conception. C'est dernier cri! The last cry," she added in English to assure them fully.

Arthur's eyes watered with annoyance. They were being fleeced alive. He could easily have knocked the girl down, but what would that have availed? It was a different sort of force that was needed, and he felt himself as generic man in the biblical assertion, "crushed before the moth." Still Alice was fairly screaming in the hat, and he hated to give it up; the déjeuner of the Viceroy was upon them in less than two hours. Again she put it on; this time the girl looked indifferently out of the window, offering no encouraging comment. At the very moment the depressed victims were exchanging guilty glances the great Gervaise came himself through the room on his way to early déjeuner—or late absinthe. He bowed impressively to them, his eyes conveying a flash of warning to the girl, who said nonchalantly, as if in contempt for the whole incredible situation, "Madame now finds the hat too dear"—hardly able to believe in her own words.

"Nothing is dear that removes ten years from the face of a woman and compels even the husband of madame to become again her lover," he protested, with a meaning

smile, leaving them just as Vera came slowly from yet another private room on the opposite side, unconsciously adding to their embarrassment.

"Charming, Madame Alice, charming, and most becoming!" she cried.

"And not dear, Madame la Comtesse—only fifty *dollai-r-r*," drawled the girl, sure of an ally in the grande dame, whom she at once recognised as one of the best patrons of the establishment.

But Vera turned a scornful face of offended astonishment upon her, "*Vous vous trompez, vous êtes imbécile*," she said rapidly in French. "Madame is neither actress nor *cocotte*—give her the hat for a hundred francs, *tout de suite*."

Instantly the girl's demeanour changed. "As Madame la Comtesse demands," she assented, cringing obsequiously. "Since Madame la Comtesse is so loyal a patron of the house always, it shall be as she wishes, twenty *dollair-r-r-s*," and she placed the hat within its nest of tissue papers in a blue box, with *CHEZ GERVAISE* set slanting across the side and on the top, in silver letters.

As they left the shop together neither Alice nor Arthur felt much elation over the morning's work; but the hat was a marvel. Mary called lovingly after them as they finally drove away to their *déjeuner*.

"You will have a great success, as they say over here; no one else will be there half so handsome!"

The Viceroy welcomed Alice with distinguishing cordiality, as if his memory retained her as an individual, but she needed all the exhilaration her new hat could afford

for she was seated between a deaf Russian Prince and a Polish diplomat. The former stared at her for a moment and made but one comment, "Americanski," laying at the same time a delaying hand on the stuffed shrimps being offered him among the wilderness of hors d'œuvre. "Ocharovatelni!" (charming) he murmured, more to his plate than to her, and did not notice her further. As he became inaudible she turned to her other neighbour, only to find to her despair that he spoke all languages except English. She understood his opening sentences to that effect, but her untrained ear made little of those that followed,—seeing which he said with effort, "I speak the English vary little,—understand,—not one word." After which he confined his conversation to a German on his other side, who spoke everything boldly and unafraid, whose husband opposite was bent on demonstrating to his own satisfaction that Shakespeare in German was infinitely more inspiring than in English, and at last recited the lines of the grave-digger in Hamlet to prove his position.

The old Viceroy was disclaiming any merit in German and claiming for Russia every art and artist after his favourite hobby. "Tschaikowsky, a Russian? Nyet," protested the Pole.

"Nu da," insisted the Viceroy.

"And Rubinstein?"

"Russian."

"And Paderewski and Verestchagin and Munkaczy and Styka? And Dostoievsky and Sienkiewicz?"

"Russian!"

"And Chopin?"

"Russian!"

"German!" cried another.

"French of heart," was Henri de Gaston's plea.

"He is neither Pole nor French nor German," said Paul de Hauteville, "the best of three nations is his."

Wrenski could no longer keep silent. "It is admitted Germany gave him depth of sentiment, from France came his light mood, his grace,—but it is Poland that alone could give his chivalric mind, his romantic pain."

"There is no Poland; there is only Russia to-day," the Viceroy was implacable. Suddenly remembering himself to be the host he raised his glass, saying, "We have in Russia this proverb: a bad peace is better than a good quarrel." The Pole left the argument with a shrug.

Thrown upon her own resources, since she could not follow their discussion, Alice took the opportunity thus afforded to study the room in which they were seated. Without openly staring about her it was easy to note its peculiar elegance: the impressive silver behind massive glass doors, the crystal and crested service, the velvet-footed butlers and the growing plants everywhere. No one loves flowers or triumphs in their arrangement as the Russian does. It is poetry and religion to him; it is passion and it is art.

The table spread before them to-day was outlined in garlands of blue and white hyacinth bells. At intervals a slender crystal vase of the flowers on their green stalks lifted the effect, while in the centre was a mound of varied blooms in all their spring colours and intoxication

of odour—fragrant as a Russian loves fragrance, with no perfume ever too insistent for his Oriental taste.

She looked sidewise at her Russian prince, who was now serving himself to a concoction of mushrooms, goose livers, and cheese. His gaze quickened as he scraped the savoury morsels from the side of the massive silver dish and piled them enthusiastically on his own plate, at the same time recommending it to her with a wave of his handsome hand. She was torn between a wish to call him *Votre Altesse* or *Mon Prince*, as Henri did, and the desire to scream triumphant democracy at him. It was sudden to sit by her very first prince without a word of warning; she wished it had been Browning's last Duchess instead! It was an uncomfortable honour, one with which she would have willingly dispensed.

Her glance strayed aside to Paul de Hauteville. High society evidently bored him, but it suited his book to have Vera established there. He wished her courted and remarked. Her white face would never compromise him, her music had won an immediate *succès d'estime*, and she was never to be heard outside her own doors, thereby drawing within them the most exclusive idlers of the upper ton, people who wished to say that they had heard her. If their social life was a game they were playing together, they played it surpassingly well.

In reality no foreign man is ever completely at rest with an American wife, however elucidating her bank account upon his life problems, however satisfactory her *ménage*, or handsome her children. He is himself only with the women of the old world, over whom his sway is

supreme. There is a comprehension between them not found in the trans-oceanic alliance; what the sea has parted man may not join together.

Paul and the countess sitting next him to-day understood all this; indeed, it went without saying, as almost everything did they counted worth saying. There was an air of indolence, of repose, of general comprehension and world-familiarity. Almost every person at the table, so sweet with innocent spring flowers, had had his or her history. Scandal had busied herself some time or other with them all. One was reputed to wear the bar sinister of royalty; another had plotted against his sovereign; there had been indiscretions manifold; but on this enviable day, around the heavy, carved table of the Viceroy, who cared to recall his own or another's past? Such débris as the last year's floods had submerged was not less a matter of indifference to them.

The women's toilets were light but elegant, their voices low and animated. The men were courtly, gracious, fluent. Alice never remembered having been in an atmosphere so velvety, so furry in texture. It was like a soft Velasquez, though the host himself looked more than ever like a Rembrandt portrait, a brown study done in tones of autumn woods or the tint of the heart of a chestnut bur. He was a patrician in feature, a patriot by the lines that furrowed the face upon which the map of Russia's later conquests had written itself for ever,—a sumptuous personality, keenly mental, though weary now.

Yet all about her she felt the enveloping of an insidious cynicism, a sophistication more subtle than any which

America could hope to reproduce;—perfect tact, naturalness, and sparkle,—yet how much they kept back! How on the surface the game of society was played by them, these most accomplished players. Nothing might obtrude here, though evil would be complacently condoned in its proper place and time.

Wrenski did the honours delightfully when, after the first few skirmishes, the famous old host emitted scarcely a sound; but the fluency of the wine in the hands of three lackeys in small clothes made up for their master's taciturnity, the result proving one of complete geniality.

To Alice these people all gave the impression of being thoroughly to the manner born, at home together and beyond necessity of effort. Aware of each other's favourite topics as they were of each other's taste in wines, they united in tacit mutual avoidance of personal topics or obstructing contradictions.

They knew—or had forgotten rather—the vivid, shady, or tragic history attaching to each other's legend. There was no fear of an awkward silence, an unfortunate allusion, a too suggestive mot. Politics were impossible too, for these men were too high in their various governments to dare a monosyllable, since to be quoted was to lend authenticity. Of music they all talked eagerly; but of others no more than of themselves, unless it was in an aside cleverly whispered, or an insinuation that carried no purport except to him for whom the innuendo was intended.

It appeared that no one not of themselves was worth thinking of or speaking of. Their voices were never

raised. The impression was so subdued that when Arthur laughed aloud it was consciously ignored by all the guests, who looked away from him and from his wife as if to heighten the assurance of their not having heard it. The old Viceroy stared at his particular flunkey, who stood behind his own chair, as if he had suddenly dropped a silver dish upon the vice-regal head.

Alice, realising it all, grew hot in spite of herself. Wrenski, drinking from half a dozen glasses in turn, was asking indifferent questions of his neighbour in a bored manner. He scarcely addressed a remark to the woman on his right, the wife of the Polish diplomat; with whom, however, rumour mated his devotion beyond the pale of ordinary intimacy. Their indifference seemed to Alice so unfeigned that she wished herself sitting by him now, with a chance to stir him from his passivity. "An American dinner set in plaster of Paris," she labelled the affair afterward to Mary.

Arthur alone seemed to be enjoying himself, and in the frank fun of their childhood reminiscences and long forgotten American jokes, Vera who never talked, Vera who never joked, she to whom American humour was confessedly repugnant, who avowedly hated a facetious attitude, was losing her remote identity for once. She made sly allusions that set him off like a belligerent fire-cracker. She set him worrying some old theme till his fancy had rigged it forth grotesquely, rhymed it in a limerick or even degraded it into a pun. Led on by her amusement he worried his jokes as one worries a playful puppy. He was in the highest spirits and cared not a

jot for the suppressed atmosphere about him. Vera knew better; her own smile never went beyond an indulgent flicker, however mirthful her eyes, which were oftenest lowered discreetly upon her plate. Yet something in her that was really the latent love of fun, long uncalled and unwanted, arose and revelled in this harmless little carnival of American wit and nonsense. He had finished lampooning her King Row, as he had dubbed her titled admirers, and was advocating life to be taken in tabloids large or small, according to mood, when to one at least of the Viceroy's guests the signal for leaving the table came as a relief.

It was shortly after, while Alice was chatting against time with the German woman who had sat near her during breakfast, that Henri de Gaston, breaking from the men in the dining-room, came and stood beside her.

She began one of her characteristic bright rodomontades, but he replied in muffled vein as benumbed as the rest by his environment.

"What is it that you think of these ladies?" he asked her, amusement lurking in his eyes. "You think them false, empty,—no, *mon Dieu!* you think them only stupide! But no, it is ever thus that they hold themselves in the world. It is not a pose for them, because in Europe they do not have the habit to express themselves with too much of the revelation. Par example, all the world knows Wrenski to be the exclusive property of a certain comtesse, here present; but to regard them together—it is absolutely to regard the ice." Alice glanced toward Vera; seeing it Henri hastened to add: "Ah,

the little American comtesse knows this; she is by nature an actress. It is not difficult for her, this sentiment glacé since she has by birth the manner still and cold; enfin, Paul has schooled her well. He also is 'tout à fait gentil,' as one says—his manner reveals nothing of himself. Your good mari, madame, has the eyes too expressive, he is as the open book; Wrenski au contraire is the sealed book; it is Paul one thinks to read most easily of them all, but one gains nothing."

Again Alice felt herself put in the wrong, admitting the superficiality of the standard. "They are not like our American women," she asserted, "they seem to have faded mentally. I cannot imagine their doing anything. They are mere shadows of their husband's names. Why should they be at such trouble to conceal their true feelings and thoughts after all?"

"Mon Dieu!" cried Henri, aghast. "Every woman at the table has had her history. What tales of love each one shall hide! If your American ladies go beyond ours in doing of the romantic adventure, yours is a race of a sublime originality and audacity as well!"

In the dining-room Paul had taken Vera's empty place beside Arthur Johnston. The two men, so sharply contrasted externally, so closely woven in the fate of a third and that third a woman, presented no vital peculiarity to the remainder of the guests. They chatted of cigars, of many inconsequent things, Paul always suggesting the topic and listening, while Arthur enlarged on theme after theme until he was in the best of the humours known even to his sunny nature.

As the amusements of the Riviera came to the surface for their turn, the old Viceroy rose to leave the room with a sharp inclusive glance in their direction.

Paul raised his glass with a graceful inclination full of homage, in response, stepped back to replace it upon the table, and said carelessly to Arthur:

"You play baccarat, I suppose, — all Americans excel at that; we have some faithful players at the Cercle in Monte Carlo; I should be honoured to present you if you like."

"I should like it of all things. It is very kind of you to propose it," assented Arthur, cordially. "I want to see all I can over here, while I have the opportunity, I confess." They entered the drawing-room together: Paul going toward Alice, who was glad enough to welcome him with his English speech, while Arthur drifted toward Vera. She was seated with her back to the door of the dining-room, but her sentence wavered for an instant as the two men entered together — as if there was something disquieting to her in their new assumption of comradeship.

"It remains for us to console each other while our lost loves revive their souvenirs of infancy, is it not?" Paul remarked gaily, wishing, perhaps, to cover the evident attraction Vera was exerting by his careless treatment of the indiscretion. "They are almost as the brother and sister; it is without doubt an association of actual infancy."

"I don't know about that," replied Alice, growing

unaccountably uncomfortable. "They are old friends," she added simply. There was really nothing to make a mystery of. Henri de Gaston stared at her anew. She was a woman of much aplomb if she made such a statement in cold blood. He had believed an American always to profess more of puritanism.

"And madame in her turn, I am sure, has never lacked for a friend," he began insinuatingly; but Paul broke in rapidly in French: "The friend is not known as the lover in English, you are a beast, Henri. Cease — tiens, tiens!"

"Et puis? And after?" demanded Henri calmly, and turned to Alice unabashed. "If it arrives that madame ever has need of a friend, me voici! Truly I say my mind badly, but the smile has for its own all languages, and you, madame, speak also with your eyes to the confusion of your poor scholar."

He bowed his head as if already much impressed. Alice understood him; it was only the acting out of the perpetual drama, but her wit had deserted her. She wished herself far away, and was grateful to Comte de Hauteville for assuming all the responsibility of the conversation. This comedy was played too insincerely and was in itself too complex for her. Yet in her embarrassment she made a more desirable impression than Arthur. Her ignorance of languages served her better than she knew; her shyness had been taken for haughtiness.

By common consent the mari was un drôle, in spite of the fact that he was handsome and rich sans doute,

as all Americans must be. Wrenski had included them; the old Viceroy had permitted them; Paul de Hauteville had presented them. It went without saying that their cards would all be left at the villa des Orangier half way between Beaulieu and Monte Carlo as soon as those of the strangers were presented; then the incident would be closed.

"Were you homesick here alone?" Alice was asking Mary on their return. "Did you finish that serial letter of yours? Wrenski asked for you and sent his most esteemed assurances of something less intimate than compliments to you, or an intimation of an equally reserved recognition of your existence."

"Homesick? Not a bit," said Mary. "Lady Kintore and her nephew drove out and stayed until just now. She declares you have a rather smart figger. She pronounced it to rhyme with trigger!"

"How does the nephew wear?" asked Alice, undeterred by the compliment.

"Oh, he is not half bad!" mimicked Mary. "But I think Lady Kintore is worried about him. She seems very, very careful of him. She wants him to go to Rome dreadfully, but he says he could not possibly bear the climate there—not at present any way," she amended conscientiously.

"She will need to be more careful of him yet. When a man's heart and lungs are both getting into trouble he has not much that is vital left untouched!" retorted Alice. Mary Ingram smiled as if such invalidism were the most amusing complication imaginable.

“And what impression did you get of high society?” It was her turn to interrogate. A little desperate glint hardened the older woman’s eyes,—

“Mary, child, to tell you honestly how I feel, I would rather be a dirty little tug-boat toting coal in the North River for an honest living than the grandest pleasure yacht ever anchored off the Monaco moorings!”

The girl was puzzled, but deep in her inmost being something understood and responded with “the everlasting yea.”

CHAPTER VIII

PRIX DE PARIS

AND how art thou, little Quaker lady, this morning? Art thou in good heart for thy day of merry making?"

Mary Ingram raised her eyes wonderingly at Arthur's playful salutation. "Why do you call me that?" she enquired.

"Because thou hast so demure a mien, and dost cast down thine eyes for modesty and not for coquetry as thy flaunting sisters, until I would fain be Sir William Penn himself in fustian."

"I look down at the sea and the flowers of course; but I never thought of it. I hope it did not seem like an affectation. It is not truly. I have so much to think about over here I have forgotten all about myself."

Perhaps she suddenly realised that she had forgotten somebody else; she stopped, rather confused by her own recollections. Was the wine of youth fermenting then in Mary's veins? Who should say? Least of all the girl herself.

"Don't awaken!" cautioned Arthur, observant of the change in her expression. "Go right on walking in your sleep. If you wake up you may be frightened by

your dizzy surroundings and fall off the ridge pole of high society. As long as somnambulism is synonymous with happiness by all means keep it up!"

"But I don't want to seem like a Quaker——" objected Mary.

"Then thou must sometimes lift thine eyes," he retorted gaily; but his own eyes were on yesterday and to-morrow and every day when he had seen or might see Vera. Of the passing show about them he saw perhaps even less than Mary despite her downcast gaze.

It was the morning of the most popular race of the season, the Prix de Paris at Nice; the rose-coloured clouds were starting forth over the Mediterranean, like Guido's Aurora, breaking from the edge of the day in billowing chariots drawn by horses of the Sun.

The party was well on its way before noon: Lady Kintore, Mary, and Alice in the tonneau of a glittering red monster Mercedes, with Colonel Lyndon-Carr and Henri de Gaston riding backward and Arthur out beside the chauffeur.

It grew to be a pearl of a day, with cloudless blue overhead, the umbrella palms and solemn cypresses below to rest the eye by their deep shadow, the bandit cactus lurking behind many a lonely crag; and all steeped in an air sunny with golden mimosa in full bloom and sweet with a hundred mingling odours.

Each moment the car was zigzagging for cabs and market waggons, jogging on their forward way all unperturbed by the threats of their horn. Without slackening their pace they threaded the maze like magic.

Villefranche was soon left behind with its ominous warships lying in the harbour at the foot of the cliffs. Far out on the cape the light-house might have been a peaceful village steeple, so serenely slept the sea beneath.

“Out of our road!” called Alice, to one more than usually obdurate vehicle; “we are busy people!”

As they turned the last curve of Mount Baron, snow-capped mountains rose before them, opposing their white glamour to the sorceries of the sea so far below. The unbroken expanse of blue spread before them its countless white sails, standing out against the horizon, where a solitary steamer trailed her black smoke across the offing. A coast down the precipitous curves of Mount Baron, a sharp turn around the porte and the old Château, a flight along the magnificent sweep of that Promenade Anglais which makes Nice the envy of the world—and they were out on the three-mile stretch to the race-track, almost on a level with the sea. Now for a run at full speed, with the green waves almost tumbling against their wheels, and the huddling gulls screaming in crews overhead to add to the excitement. Off to the right were the infrequent villa gates of stone or of wrought iron, following some antique model, with ramping lions and dancing fauns. Above the walls ran waving hedges of bamboo broken by stretches of grass glistening green in the hot sunshine, varied now and again by acres of solid colour in some florist's garden.

Before them on their path moved a triple line of

equipages. Two in a cab, seven in a cab; everything goes at Nice in race week. Extortion is a matter of course. Girls are perched up beside the drivers, high on the box; boys dangling their legs from behind; the interiors overflowing. Race week makes comrades of us all!

Catching up now with the led horses in their coroneted blankets they passed a host of liveried carriages, smart traps, and flashing motors, side by side with little jingling donkey carts and pony carts pattering merrily along, driven by solemn mighty coachmen much doubled up as to limbs, and occupied by sedate nurses and broods of golden-haired children.

"How one misses the officers!" screamed Lady Kintore at the top of her lungs. "At Rome they give all the flavour to the races—and to the hunts, too."

"I don't miss anything. Don't put it in my head," screamed Alice in reply. "It is too exciting just as it is."

Even the hackney cabs caught the spirit of sport, and lurched forward in response to the whips of their drivers at a reckless, intoxicated scramble.

There is no race track in the wide world the setting of which is of more spectacular beauty than this, lying as it does between the Maritime Alps and the Mediterranean, with an unbroken panorama of both; separated only from the actual shore by a waste of marshland entirely overgrown with plumed pampas grass that adds an inexpressible note to the colour marvels of the Côte d'Azur. From the flash-light at Villefranche to

its brother at Antibes, the eye follows the crescent of the curving coast unhindered, or rises from the green fields, edged with rustling bamboo or giant palms, up to the forbidding crags of La Turbie, or the white cowled peaks that westward cut the blue as it wells toward the zenith in changeless serenity.

Outside the actual course every adjacent tree was full of gamins employing the branches to advantage. The housetops also, though few and scattered, were covered with black figures intent on the distant view. On the road a single line of vehicles stretching indefinitely away attempted to steal its glimpses of pleasure, but was kept constantly in motion by a corps of mounted police. These cleared the road at intervals, that traffic might not be entirely suspended and a show of authority be preserved, more than from any real desire to interfere with the pleasure of the people. Accosted by this challenge each car would advance a few feet, or a carriage turn around; then the road would thicken in for another uninterrupted half hour of enjoyment.

The monster Mercedes had to bide its time with the rest; once inside the fence there were perfect order and ample space despite the thousands of moving human beings. The first race had been run. Many of the aristocratic occupants of the grandstand boxes were strolling about among the paddocks, selecting their favourites, showing their costumes when feminine, and exchanging shrill greetings with exclamations of surprise and delight. The band was playing as they took their places, so overcome at first by the sheer beauty of

the scene that they hardly noticed the bookmakers gesticulating, or the tea-coloured heels and lace petticoats of the languid women moving about in chiffon and fur, with every conceivable sort of escort, keeping time to the thud of the drum as the brass crashed and lured in flighty strains.

They soon discovered Vera and Paul across the green, preferring the comfort of their own landaulet to the crowded stand, it appeared. Their chauffeur and footman, one on either side, stood faultlessly erect, permitting no relaxation to betray their satisfaction with the arrangement. It was not the first race made possible to them by the consideration of their master, Monsieur le Comte; he never forgot his servants. It was a relic of his days of campaigning when officer and soldier had shared alike and so had left the relationship peculiar for ever.

There was a group of men of polyglot nationality standing about their car; but it was not until Baron von Wreden joined them that Paul de Hauteville descended and snapped the door decisively behind him upon Vera, to take a brief promenade on foot among the crowd. He soon returned; the racers were coming out. The horses themselves were nervous, irritable, rangy of build and satin of coat. Their jockeys were for the most part hard-faced lads, tricky and bold, keen for advantage, and quick to seize upon it or repel attack if it were to be snatched from them by a rival. From them the horses caught every mood and became all but human in their response or resentment. When a

score of them, champing, quivering under the spur, curvetting, sidling, crowding, rearing to be off, wheeled suddenly and were put at a trial hurdle down the spurt, Alice and Mary threw away all their previous Sunday scruples in a flash.

Off at last! Straight into the blue, a piebald chorus of rhythmic forms. They had no look of feet in their flight. Crazed by their effort to gain, their eyes wild from the breath of the others on neck and flanks, nostrils blazing and distended, they lifted to the hurdle's challenge. Off the ground they rose like a flock of huge frightened birds, their shining hoofs silhouetted heavily for a flashing instant against the vivid Italian sky as they soared!

Then the thud, the recover,—followed by the flattening to the course and again the strain of the obstacle in their path! Crushing together—they came, crowding neck and neck for a point of attack.

On such a day the pride of life is in the ascendant. On such a day the relative merits of Catholicism versus the Reformation, science and education, all go down before the call of the blood and the shivering brute on which one's fancy is set or one's money staked!

Vera was colourless; but her eyes blazed. Paul's face was more emotionless still; his cigarette remained unlit. He had enough up on the Duc d'Enghien to make this race more than a pastime. Paul de Hauteville was working to-day; he hardly admitted to himself how vital it was that his proverbial luck should hold, or that honour might be the stake he risked,

As he recognised Arthur Johnston making his way across to them through the surging crowd he laid his hand for an instant on that of Vera. It quickened him. She was still his; nothing yet had changed and his horse had won the first heat. He was a fool to be apprehensive.

Alice noticed her husband's restlessness and herself suggested that he go and make his *dévoirs* to their friends. His face brightened eagerly. "You won't mind being left?" he said ingenuously, thereby disclaiming any difficulty on the score of the leaving, nor had he waited to hear her disclaimer.

"But really, now, you know this is not so much!" Colonel Lyndon-Carr was protesting. "You ought to see a race in England, you know—the Ascot now—or a hunt, even—I should most awfully like to ride to hounds again myself!" The horses had stirred him, too, it seemed. Mary, on her part, was thrilling to the excitement of it like a violin under a master hand.

"I don't see how the dear horses ever get over those vicious hurdles. Don't they get stage fright sometimes and refuse?" she was asking:

"Not if they are thoroughbred; they take them naturally enough——"

"Genius finds only a step to mount upon in the obstacle that downs the common herd," struck in Lady Kintore sententiously.

"A five-barred gate means flight to the thoroughbred and obstacle to the over-spurred mongrel! How is that for a proverb to match with the old Viceroy?" said Alice.

Yet the day had somehow lost its wings to her—or was the hurdle set for her too high?

“Who is that very handsome woman over in the seventh box?” she asked Henri de Gaston when he came back to his place beside her. He lifted his monocle, and dropping it carelessly, forgot to reply in the preoccupation of its recovery. She asked again. After some difficulty he located the object of her admiration, a blonde of rather negligent manner, and graceful beyond her rivals. She was only slightly “made up,” and gowned with incomparable taste. Henri stared at her blankly. “Connais pas,” he replied. “Regardez, madame. They come!”

In his heart he was wondering why this American woman had singled out Héléne Prévile from ten thousand others of her sex to be curious about.

For an hour or more it went on; one race interchanging with another to fan the smouldering enthusiasm; the band always crashing in between. It was like an Englishman in Colonel Lyndon-Carr to have chosen to talk to Mary as he rarely talked to any one, under cover of the crowd. He spoke of his home and of English ways in an oddly intimate fashion that seemed to include her in his sense of it all and of its value. On her part, she was finding him a distinguished exception, with his English brawn and careless tweeds, in the mob of dapper and bejewelled foreigners on all sides, whose atmosphere was more redolent of blended scents from artistic perfumers than of their tubs.

“Cheap foreign, I call it, don’t you know? It’s all

bally rot—this life here. It's too beastly mixed for women, and it does up a man's nerve to hang about and play tennis all day, or shoot at tame pigeons——”

“Why, I think it a perfect paradise!” she asserted, lifting her blue eyes full upon him in reproach.

“You see with your own eyes through what you are!” he muttered brusquely, as if ashamed of himself for admitting it.

“This sort of thing rings a bit false to a chap who has been out so long where a cannon is his steady messmate,” he qualified shamefacedly, afraid she might think him putting on side about his record. “England expects a lot more of her officers than to have them stuff out a uniform on a holiday! When you have seen your men ploughed under a few times, don't you know? it makes you wonder what's the odds after all. It might as well have been your turn.”

The girl shivered even in the Riviera sun.

“The band must bring it all back to you,” she said, with a long breath.

“The yells are the music out there. The bands forget; except the bugle, that never funks.” Mary shivered again.

“That's it, too,” he cried, noticing the tremour that ran lightly over her. “It is scorching by day and shaking by night. The flag is a staggering mistress to reel after; but she's the Queen, God bless her! Her lovers live and feel—it's a game career!” He had sprung to his feet in his fervour; he continued erect as he finished: “It is deed or death; then the dark. It's hell or victory!

Oh, I say, I have got the battle bite to-day! Why didn't you pull me up short?"

The girl was carried away with him. For a minute she wished she was a man, a hero of course. Then she was glad she was not—oh, so glad! The cause of her reaction one may interpret as one pleases.

The Duc d'Enghien was to run again. They turned their attention undividedly to the horses. Paul's smile did not falter over his set teeth, though his self-control grew a shade more tense. Arthur had returned to sit with his own party through a race or two when the de Hautevilles came across the track, but Paul, as it happened, being called away again, Arthur was left to act as Vera's escort on her return to her own place.

It was a mere chance, of course, but Alice was conscious of disappointment as she saw him go. It would have been more attractive to share the novelty of it all with him, and to stroll about with him, than to make up conversation in restricted idiom with this Frenchman, who, despite his gentle amiability and engaging gaiety, belonged to a different world and had a different destiny. Nor was it less tedious to overhear the blunt confidence of the younger pair at her side. While Vera remained with them many glasses had been levelled in their direction. She was well known and Paul moved in a circle whose names figured at length in the society journals of both watering place and capital. Mary Ingram had completely ignored the men on her arrival.

Pointing to the discomfiture of her cavaliers and the

deserted group still hovering about the empty landaulet, Alice protested laughingly, "Arthur always said no one came near you without falling in love with you!"

She had spoken on an impulse of hearty admiration as she fell under the spell of Vera's charm of manner, the perfection of her grace and even the detail of her simple costume, but she felt with instant compunction that she had unintentionally overdone her cordiality. Vera's expression remained unchanged. If Arthur's wife was trying to take her by surprise, she would not be gratified. If she was as naïve as she appeared—impossible! How could a woman speak so to another in sincerity? Rivalry forbade. Either this Alice Johnston was very deep or very great. Either she was so indifferent to Arthur that his disloyalties ceased to move her, or she must love him with something of the maternal indulgence that is given to a spoiled child.

"I used to think it was only his boy romance—that he had idealised you," Alice was saying brightly, including them all in her gay confidence; "but no; you are far more wonderful than I ever expected to find you. Ever since I heard you play I have quite understood his adoration of you; I should not respect him if he did otherwise!"

It seemed to Vera crude and out of taste to speak in this way. It was almost garish—this pressing of her advantage home for every one to behold. It left her disarmed. She preferred Arthur's sentiment to remain vaguely unformulated and unguessed; it thinned piti-

fully in the clear, bright air of such analysis! Recognised, it became powerless—even objectionable. Held up for public commendation it lost colour at once and became a mere pale platitude. More than all it revealed a poise in the wife to which the other woman had not attained; to Vera's sophisticated reckoning, trained in the schools for scandal of her time, it argued a dearth of passion in the restricted circle of legitimate matrimonial joy. This Alice appeared so to live in the open that it became disconcerting. It seemed to Vera that if she really feared her power over Arthur she would not be so ingenuously, breezily transparent. It occurred to her, too, that Paul might have observed the same. This, then, and not alone his confidence in her own devotion to him, had made him so un-jealous of Arthur; so indifferent toward the flattering admiration she inspired.

While the band flung the hackneyed airs from "Carmen" out upon the blue and gold air these two women measured each other and came to their own conclusions of mutual power. They had been thrown together constantly in the casual, crowded life of the place, but nothing in the least resembling intimacy established itself between them. With Mary Ingram it had been otherwise. Her eager delight in Vera from the first meeting had led her to accept every opening that offered for closer acquaintance. It seemed to her a pity that all Vera's nature should flow in one channel, though even to herself she did not presume to criticise her, admiration filling her heart too warmly for that. She had not admitted Alice to be in the right when she maintained that, save as

love and passion had been efficient, development on the more serious side seemed arrested.

"She is very beautiful," Alice had granted, as Vera went from them to-day; "but unreal. I don't walk in the spaces where she floats. She is like a scentless white flower; I cannot imagine an honest bee trying her lips for honey—a moth, perhaps——"

"Ah, mon Dieu! The poor moth—yes! It is for the moth to die only on her heart!" cried Henri, with unexpected bitterness.

Arthur was well aware that he should have left Vera at the door of her car and returned. Being well aware of it—he stayed. Her old spell was upon him, and Alice had lost her forceful grip upon the situation, until such time as her will asserted itself sufficiently to act again upon him. Himself, he was powerless. The old miserable, nameless fascination, more cruel than in his youth, had him again in its thrall. Vera had been regardless of him always, yet her least glance set his heart off on an aimless canter.

For the last time they heard the thud of those running hoofs upon the turf—saw the bouquet of jockey colours in the crooked, crowded lift as they bunched to take the hurdles. Again the great bodies rose, torn by ragged breathing—again the recovery of balance on the other side—

Suddenly, on the farthest turn—what was it? Oh, what was it? The crowd was rising like one man. A horse had fallen—sprung to his feet—and spurred to the fore, riderless. He gained—hesitated—shot ahead—the

last hurdle was free before him. Would he take it? Yes! And now only a few hundred metres lay between him and the winning pole. A cheer went up from the crowd.

But no hand held the curb, lifted him as he came down the final stretch. Habit crossed habit, and, terrified, he galloped wild!—stopped, threw up his head with a dazed whinny, and began wandering, riderless as he was, back over the course to find his master. The Duc d'Enghien was declassed.

In the confusion, the chatter that followed, a shutter was borne hastily away behind the grandstand. "It is nothing. Absolutely nothing, my dear." "Hurt a little." "Stunned—not killed." "O pas du tout!" Every one was explaining to his neighbour reassuringly as the band burst forth again, playing the florid love song from "Aïda."

Alice and Mary left the box sick at heart. The glimpse they had caught of the lifeless face at the foot of the hurdle was not so easily wiped out.

"He did not see straight to-day—mistress left him last week," a swaggering young English jockey was saying to a groom, as they passed the paddocks of the luckless racer.

"Il est fou à cause de ça, depuis longtemps," assented the French groom dispassionately, as he buckled the ankle-straps up another hole.

"Was he killed?" whispered Mary with a sob.

"Oh, rather!" Colonel Lyndon-Carr assured her. "Deuced unpleasant and unsatisfactory to be pitched headlong into eternity that way; beastly waste of life,

too, I call it, thrown away to amuse the millionaires and cocottes of the sporting world. We have a cleaner fear of Old King Terror out in the sight of Kingdom-Come, where I belong."

"Poor broken-hearted boy!" cried Alice. "I shall never go to a steeple chase again! Nothing teaches goodness like a contact with sin. It is not gay or sparkling or attractive; it is hollow and grisly and cheap!"

They beckoned to Arthur, who started to join them, when a motor car stopped short, barring his egress, and a flunkey dropped from its box. Arthur looked up but noticed no more than a scar on the man's cheek. At the same time a woman's slim grey-gloved hand was outstretched to him and a sweet low voice said:

"Pardon. It is Monsieur Johnston, is it not? I do not deceive myself? Alors, do me a great favour, I pray you; present this note to Madame de Hauteville. As you see, to reach her in this crush is not possible for my servant." The accent was French, of course—the whiff of hyacinth from her corsage fresh and caressing.

"With pleasure," he said cordially, taking the dainty missive. Instantly the car glided forward and out of sight.

"Odd, how she knew me!" he said, recounting the little adventure to the others later. "I suppose I have met her somewhere or other. Ever so many girls have bowed to me to-day that I can't remember meeting before. They have at Monte Carlo, too."

Colonel the Honourable Lyndon-Carr and Henri de-Gaston exchanged incredible glances.

"Give me the note," said Henri carelessly, "I render myself to the Duchesse de Malcœur for dinner to-night, so I shall see la comtesse without fail." He did not say he would deliver it without fail.

The promenade was packed with idlers waiting to see the procession returning from the races. No one guessed the heart-burnings of the eclipsed, the despair of the losers, or above the cavalcade of fashion perceived the face of the little dead jockey, whose love had abandoned him and forced him down to this ignominious end. It was a scene of carnival animation, and the occupants of the sumptuous carriages and flashing cars were frankly envied as they sped away to the crowded tea houses for refreshment, before turning to the evening occupations of the wonderful gay life of the rich.

The sun set. One by one the lights were lit along the crescent curving from Mount Baron to the deserted race course. The flash-light gleamed across the water from Antibes and was answered faithfully by the brother at Villefranche. The moon rose over the Bay of Angels and the night wind sighed softly through the waving plumes of pampas grass in haunted whispers.

If the ghost of the young jockey rode again the victorious race upon his phantom steed, none of the gay world was there to see or shudder. No; the gay world was forgetting, revelling, killing time and itself, far away. The girl in a tawdry cabaret tried also to forget,—by means of the imitation pleasures more coarsely meted out to such as she.

CHAPTER IX

WITH THE NIGHT MOTHS

OH, no," said the deaf Prince; "I will not accept your invitation to the opera and for supper. The opera is all alike to the deaf. Louise, Madame Butterfly, Thaïs, Manon,—always the same,—only a thin disguise of the eternal theme,—*l'amour!* My chef makes the only music I can hear now with patience. Come back to me for supper to-night."

"And if I do, will you first accompany me to the opera? It is 'Le Jongleur de Notre Dame,'" said Paul, "There is nothing of *l'amour* there to offend you."

"Jongleur? Et pas une jolie dame, pas une; non, merci! But come back to supper with me and you shall have another sort of music. You shall have a Russian fish that is a veritable nocturne of the sea waves, an allegro of wild bird, a polonaise of fromage, truffle, and champignons. There shall be asperge or artichoke for intermezzo, a love song of a game paté, a sorbet that will give *da capo* to the whole!"

"A gourmet for a lover,"—Paul summed up with a smile of tolerance. They had been dining at the "Cercle," previous to a variety of evening engagements, and the deaf prince was voluble among men as never when the feminine atmosphere recalled his infirmity.

"Eating is more real than love," he was contesting now, "a more lasting joy than art. The cult of the cuisine has the chef for high priest, who can ask what he will of me. Mine can give me borstchock that is the blood of the gods, a salmis de perdreaux whose pleasure is keener than a kiss. Love, my dear boy, is a passing weakness of youth. Eating is the perpetual heaven of maturity; very hot and very cold interchangeably to create the excitement of reaction. Champagne frappé à la Sibérie—to claret warm as rose petals in the sun at noon. Moselle sparkling like twinkling frost on the little mother Volga at home in my Russia of an early winter morning!"

No one interrupted him and he rambled on as if to himself: "And of liqueurs? Nyet; Château Yquem for me. Menthe for old women, yellow chartreuse for girls, fin champagne for boys who have learned to pass by the simpler tastes. Eating is a creed, but wine, my friends, is a religion!"

Arthur was flushed from his few glasses, but Wrenski, their host, drank as steadily as he ate, methodically yet without interest. Paul now lifted his glass, bowing to the apologist of the table, "I protest, mon prince. You have disdained the fair in your catalogue of charmers; I propose a toast in defence: To everybody's favourite widow, la Veuve Clicquot!" he cried gaily.

"Champagne is not wine," objected the prince flatly, as he drained his glass. "All poetry and all the sister arts are striving toward a perfection they will never attain in mortal recognition. This art alone has al-

ready arrived at an exquisite perfection, and lifts all within its mellowing touch to a momentary paradise."

He motioned the servants to refill the glasses, then: "To the angel of wine, that opens the door of the gods to mortals!" he said, lifting his glass with solemnity.

"One might read character from the vows made in wine," suggested Arthur. "Rosalind's were boasted to be false as those so made——"

Paul followed him eagerly. "Do you then, also, as myself, believe in divination?" he asked. "It is the fashion for men to scoff at it—or pretend to, especially your countrymen. But Rome supported a college of divination as late as the fourth century, and the Greek philosophers practised the consultation of sibyls unblushingly."

"Mais—to what end?" asked Wrenski.

"To avert disaster, to secure happiness—enfin to know—beyond ourselves!" replied Paul, rising.

"We have in Russia a proverb apropos," said the Viceroy. "An unknown soul is darkness."

The younger men left the room together, to find their ladies awaiting them at the opera, only Wrenski and the deaf prince remaining for one more cigar with the old Viceroy. The latter turned openly toward the younger man, saying with a motion indicating the chair recently occupied by Arthur Johnston:

"He is an honest garçon. Why permit Paul de Hauteville to ruin him? The wife deserves better."

Wrenski's face was a blank.

"Take him away," nodded the prince, who never

listened, knowing he could not hear a reply if it was the most convincing ever made him, but construing the meaning of his old friend by intuition or pantomime.

"Or better," said the Viceroy finally, "since it is the same in the end, amuse Hélène yourself. You are no honest garçon to lose your innocence."

Wrenski drank first a glass of vodka that stood untasted at his elbow, then a petit verre of a cocoa liqueur which he always affected in his moods of transparent simplicity. The two old men waited, but no response came.

"Eh bien?" cried the Viceroy at last, interrogatively.

Wrenski started, as if he had been deep in thought over his own affairs.

"You can't be growing deaf at your age!" exclaimed the prince irascibly.

"I am not a boy—after all," Wrenski reminded them gently. By some inexplicable vagary of the provoking mystery of the deaf, the prince always heard Wrenski however little he tried to make himself audible.

"How old are you, Nicolai?" He shut his eyes as if recounting the intervening years. "Your mother died at Moscow—when you were born—what year was that? Eighteen hundred and——"

"Too long ago, votre altesse, to make me enough of a boy to forget the Russian proverb, 'To the drunken man the sea is only knee deep!' Too old not to be cautious; in short, too old not to know the dangers of mixing Château Yquem and yellow chartreuse, par exemple——"

"Humph," from the Viceroy.

"I don't understand you," growled the prince.

"Pardon. I will explain myself. To speak frankly without dialect or argot of the boulevards; too old to wish to provoke Paul against me; or to involve myself in an intrigue with Hélène. It is not my affair. En revanche, it is the occupation of woman to tempt and man to fall since from the beginning,—the bon Dieu so ordered it on the first page of the epic of our race."

The shaggy eyebrows of the prince drew together threateningly.

"I see more since I hear so little. Madame Johnston made a good impression upon me at the déjeuner of the Viceroy—she did not interrupt me—and if——"

The Viceroy was about to speak, but the entrance of a flunkey prevented him. "Madame la Comtesse waits for Monsieur in her carriage below," he announced. Without a word beyond the formal *au revoir* and *adieu*, Wrenski preceded him from the room.

At the Miralton the day begins only when the opera ends. Until one o'clock of the morning it is a banquet hall deserted by so much as the ghost of hilarity. But when the play is over and the curtains rung down upon the mimic show, life sets her own broad stage and rings her curtain up for plays of wanton realism with or without a moral.

The red-coated orchestra is Tsigane of course; their melody one of impeded chords, strident and constraining. At intervals the hoarse Hungarian voices break in upon

the orchestration to emphasise the appeal to the senses through the nerves. When they leave off another band—of harpers accompanied by violas and violins—takes up the romantic beauty of some sheer strain of love, caressing and enervating, the harp-strings flashing in broken arpeggios that seem to scatter iridescent raptures far and wide,—the tunefulness of the yearning violins flowing like streams of silver moonlight. At small tables set about an open space in the centre of the white-and-gold publicity, or in alcoves curtained sagaciously like the proscenium boxes at the opera, sit the night moths of Monte Carlo, whose consolation is the hope of eternal immortality.

The largest of the boxes had been reserved to-night for the American and his party. They entered together,—Henri, Alice and Arthur, Wrenski and his sister on a brief visit from her ice-bound estates in far Poland. She was a simple, high-bred little woman, whom one associated more naturally with her children than as taking part in the vanity of such a world as this. Her jewels were magnificent and her husband, the absent count, very tyrannical. In these two sentences lay her life boundaries,—easily reached and impossible of extension.

They had expected to find the de Hautevilles before them, but as yet neither had made their appearance, though it was nearly two. Among the Frenchmen and ballet girls, Russians and artistes of the Variété, millionaires and actresses of all classes, the spirit of reckless gaiety prevailed. Less professional here than at Maxime's, less

sordid and less dreary than the Parisian wickedness, which always savours more of material necessity, these frail creatures of a season flutter in myriad hues and seem to lack the care for the coming frost that haunts their sisters of the North.

An Italian princess with her suite was looking indolently on, taking no part in the ensemble, though her table was among the dancers. A Spanish boy and girl were drinking with their eyes plunged deep in those of each other, oblivious of the world. A blue coquette was blowing rings of cigarette smoke into the dazzled eyes of a blasé escort, whose family was probably asleep at some cheap hillside pension out of harm's way; then the genius loci appeared just as the measures of a waltz drifted out on their dreamy way through the hall.

The master of ceremonies, the immortal George—for it was none other than he, the most beautiful and skilful professional dancer of two hemispheres—stood silently before a tall dark girl in cloudy black. Her figure seemed to melt with his into a languid waltz, as were they moulded of fervour. They glided on till the measure, growing faster, gave one the chance to observe that she wore a pale rose jupon above her pale rose slippers; that she was indeed a cloud with a rose-coloured lining, as their pace became more and more exaggerated. And now the ball was open and the floor crowded with palpitating rivals vying with each other in grace or eccentricity.

Instantly the great artist resumed his original dreamy measure. The eyes of his partner were closed, her face

wore the languor of Henri's white moth upon the heliotrope. Their dancing became all sensuousness, all grace; it was music without sound, poetry without soul, colour without form, mere elemental passion such as lawless dreams are made of. The thrall eluded portrayal; as well try to reproduce the likeness of that first Helen! Priests have been seen who served the mass with less of enraptured devotion than these devotees of pleasure.

Alice was under the fascination of eyes and ears from the first. Buried emotions and unborn ran riot in her eyes. Other dances followed, more or less extraordinary. George did his famous clog on an overturned silver salver, amid the bravos of the crowd, under a storm of coin from indulgent masculine hands still tingling from the warmth of their contact with yielding waists and supple shoulders.

It grew hotter, more crowded now. The Hungarians flung out the warning prelude of the season's frenzy, *La Mattchiche*, amid wild clapping of hands. Instantly a score or more of professionals and semi-professionals were on their feet ready to accent the extravagant features of a dance perverted from its original heathendom by the last decree of Paris.

George was dancing with a creation in gold gauze, whose bodice was deficient, but who made up for it by a bird of paradise tail in her yellow hair. Their motions were fantastic, more audaciously provocative than any attempted by the rest, until, as the music scraped the refrain of the last guttural bass chord, he bent her backward half way to the floor—and deliberately kissed her

on the tip of her nose as he held her there under a gust of applause.

"You would come, you remember; it was your idea," whispered Arthur, catching a glimpse of Alice's face over Henri's shoulder.

He was too good-looking to be chic to-night,—even in a refined way, without colour; it was not distinguished to be so blatantly handsome in evening dress; Alice herself was over-effective. She was wearing a long black lace sequined gown,—one of the new departures,—and her eyes were brilliant with excitement under the large black hat, drooping over her heavy hair in a manner quite Rubensesque.

Arthur thought her a picture; but Henri had noted the black costume with dismay; it was by chance the mark of the serpent that season to those who frequented the tree of knowledge. He told himself that possibly Madame Johnston would escape any unpleasantly conspicuous contretemps. It was undoubtedly best not to inform her of her mistake.

Unfortunately, however, the eyes of the all-seeing George had remarked the unknown beauty. According to custom he sought her out. He approached, unwarned by the proximity of Henri or Arthur, in the temporary absence of Wrenski.

"It would please her to dance,—perhaps?" he was murmuring.

Confusedly she demurred, looking to Arthur to excuse her, protesting her inability.

"Ah, it is not a question of your dancing, ma belle,

it is an affair of your desire only," he insisted, extending his hand encouragingly, as if to draw her to him.

It was Henri de Gaston who dismissed him—with a lurking smile, be it confessed,—that lingered after the instant apology and withdrawal.

Some one else was smiling, too, some one who seemed to have remarked and enjoyed the little scene with unfeigned amusement; with a bow George passed straight from the rebuff administered in behalf of Alice to "The Chauncy," and with her in his arms was soon lost in a dancer's nirvana. Once, only once, the woman glanced their way; and smiled again. Alice felt the hot blood surge through her veins and strengthen her self-respect as she noted it.

For every mark of outward disrespect and for every sting of inward self-reproach the woman of the half-world becomes insolent. It is her only armour. She tries by flaunting her captives or her charms to vaunt something her respectable rival cannot boast. She would have them envy her as mistress of the snares and secrets of seduction. Have they no lovers? Her contempt is beyond counting their existence. Have they few? She has more. Have they one? They are victims of her open sneer and innuendo. Have they, alas, lost in the unprincipled game that is more cruel and uncertain than the waverings of the roulette ball—they are a fair target. Nobody pities and nobody cares enough to blame.

To these women love is not a divine gift to be taken prayerfully from the bounty of a divine Giver, but rather

a satisfaction to be ogled from fate by fair means or foul. To them the subjection of man is the sole reason for being; passion all that marks the succession of day and night; the danger of being supplanted, a hell of immediate torment. To this class a loverless woman is a ridiculous blunder, *c'est à rire!* The approach, gratification, hope, despair, sacrifice or satisfaction of passion is their life—to which all else is tributary. The cry of Manon is theirs—

“*Qu'est-ce que tu fais,
Toi que n'as pas l'amour ?*”

Beauty is the weapon of such as these; face and form must count; one must be coquettish, cold or tender, misleading, assuring, provoking, each in turn to hold the man to his folly, once he is won. To withhold or lavish all, is distinctively a science.

No good woman ought ever to be compelled into a duel with such as they for the prize of a human male. She will lose,—at least temporarily. Man is not strong nor wise nor pure of heart—at least not often, and even more seldom when he congregates in such an environment as Monte Carlo. There he is weak, rather, and ready to be amused. He is easily flattered and, once aroused, troublesome to satiate. The Englishman who stalks unseeing through herds of his virtuous countrywomen at home, here falls an easy prey through the latent Adam in his ancestry. The Frenchman is more “*difficile*,” but more open to conviction. The Italian loses

his mind over bright eyes that beckon, and the Russian his heart. The German indulges his appetite and the American his curiosity. Provocation, pleasure, satiety, sometimes, alas! a single wrecking devotion, are all qualities to be found in this miserable compound of unrestrained human emotion and temptation, from which the experimenter, escaping, too often carries the devil's brand upon his soul.

"It is odd," commented Arthur as the night wore on, "it is really odd how quickly one feels at home here. Half a dozen of these girls have been bowing to me again—I wish I had a longer memory for faces; I don't wish to be rude even to their sort."

"It is odder that they bowed first," said Alice, "I thought that was not the code."

Henri's face looked weary—older than Alice had ever seen it. The mask had fallen perhaps as he turned to her, still watching the dancers as he spoke: "Madame Johnston, you have so much of esprit, so much insight. You see for your mari many times—give me your advice a little. What would you do if you were bound to a man you did not love—not married, you understand, bound by——"

"Engaged, you mean? Break it." Alice, too, was absorbed in the dancing.

"But what would you do if you were a man and engaged to a woman whom you no longer loved?"

"Exactly the same."

"And what if you were not engaged to her—except by the ties of nature?"

"Break it!" she cried, this time with bitterness.

"And after—what would arrive to your child—perhaps?"

She recoiled with swift repulsion. He had shocked her without intention.

"You are hard toward your own sex," he said, very low.

"Don't call any such creature one of my sex. My sex is not of such as these, I don't call them women," she asserted haughtily.

"Even they do not sin alone," suggested Henri commiseratingly.

"Temptation does not justify a fall, or two sinners the sin——"

"It is not sin—it is nature," argued the Frenchman complacently. "Nature thwarted, defied by convention—nature setting her trap for the innocent by overpowering instinct, by the charm of the sense——"

Alice started at his words. Nature setting a trap? Did that cast a sudden light on much that had been mystifying her in the relations of men and women? Before she could answer he was speaking again:

"Ah, how often the sight of your Mary kills me! I never permit her to know I observe her,—indifference is agreeable to the very young girls; but in her I see what life has for me eternally lost. It is not what she says—she is as a flower revealed—by her perfume. When I am in her presence I hear sans cesse the chant of Rostand:

'She is white as a hope of pardon.'

Society has its sacred obligations;—but now my soul is sickened and death seems the only exit.”

The refinement she had always felt in this man seemed pitiful weakness of a sudden, as she realised how the virile quality had degenerated under repeated emotional excesses of art and unrestrained desire. The most profound reasoning argues that below the virtue which is evangelical and sexless, there is a virtue of sex, deeper and to be for ever preserved. In all men and women the differentiation is slight; the race is mankind after all. But there is no artist who is not an incipient hermaphrodite, for the blend is necessary to the insight demanded by artistic creation. Here lay the peril and the power of such as Henri de Gaston.

The little Polish woman was stifling her yawns heroically; Wrenski was courteously ready to go, or to stay for the cancan, with his habitual lack of intrusive preference. He had looked on this as upon any paid performance. It meant nothing to him; but to Arthur it was all new and revealing. His habit of creative interpretation was receiving an impetus toward previously unconceived classifications, a life hitherto only a withdrawing shadow, too remote for his pen.

Henri de Gaston, mingling the impressionability of the Frenchman with the artist's lack of balance and overplus of subjectivity, was the one to whom there was a personal appeal in the night's entertainment. Alice felt confident he would return after their departure. Near at hand sat a Frenchman and his "belle amie," drinking openly from the same glass.

“ ‘Here’s to the love that lies in your eyes—that lies and that lies and that lies!’—is their toast, I guess,” commented Arthur, rising. “I can’t imagine why they call it supper they take here,—unless it is liquid food——”

Henri was growing nervous. He heard the sirens calling to the impulses within his own heart, and he was not one to turn a deaf ear. He hastened their adieu to the extent of his possibility.

“Where is mademoiselle?” he asked at last, as if something had just suggested her anew.

“Gone on a sketching trip with an English dowager to San Remo,” said Arthur.

“Grâce à Dieu!” he murmured fervently.

As they were leaving, a new enchantment stole over the room with the murmur of a yet more dreamy waltz, carrying a sustained sadness beneath the melody that seemed leaning on its breast. Alice, turning back at the outer door for one last look, saw the Chauncy gliding slowly over the polished floor with no less familiar a partner than Colonel the Honourable Lyndon-Carr. Remembering Paul’s characterisation of Henri de Gaston as elusive and perfidious, she wondered if it might not equally apply to the entire sex.

Once within their rooms at the villa she threw herself dispiritedly into the nearest chair.

“What is the matter? I thought you were enjoying it,” Arthur demanded anxiously.

“Never mind me; I am nervous,” said Alice, “I have a headache and a heartache and a sort throat. My mind is tattered, my hope is tired, and my faith in humanity

all at loose ends. I am homesick, too, and I want my children."

"My throat is a little sore, too," croaked Arthur. "I feel as if I might be going to have a chill." He rang and ordered a preventive in the shape of a Scotch-and-soda, which was forbidden save under extreme provocation.

"You are glad you are sick," said Alice wickedly; "with you not memory but Scotch remains—the only friend that grief can call her own."

But there was no mirth in her voice; the fun level was stranded like a line of dry seaweed high above the receding tide.

"I wonder what Truth was doing to-night," mused Arthur over the rim of his second glass.

"Playing with Baron von Wreden. Monsieur de Gaston said she never went to the Miralton, and Paul de Hauteville had no love of women in him."

"No one would go who lived here and knew what it was, of course. Americans rush in everywhere as spectators,—where devils dare not tread!" he finished, laughing at the conceit.

It was like Arthur to speak his thought. She knew it unspoken now, whenever that inscrutable look came into his eyes that was not hers, and that formerly had been so inexplicable. She could not sleep. Instinctively the face of the man over-seas, the man who had honoured her with his exclusive thought, so removed from all the undignified exhibitions of sentiment about her, rose before her wakeful eyes, in contrast with the weak, mobile

beauty of Henri de Gaston or the deceptive open gaze of the profligate Englishman. She compared the serious brow and the eyes, whose steady light she had never permitted herself to reproduce or remember, with these lesser mortals, men of pleasure, aimless or unworthy of aim; wasting time, ignoring the secrets of science that lay hid for the delving, the call of country, the service of God.

When she challenged the world to present a man to her vision, only those wonderful eyes shone upon her to keep the night from utter darkness. His was a nature to live for his work, and for their noble, sweet friendship, prized by him above the cheap baubles of passing diversion or the rank satisfactions of possession. He was a man whose evolution lay on the side of the spirit, she inferred. A product of the highest latter-day inspiration, the first perhaps of a new race of gods, pure of earthly passions and ordained to lift the race to its immortal reaches. To put him out of her life for ever,—was it not deliberately to lose her own best contact with the upward trend? Could she afford the sacrifice? Was it a woman's duty to merge her every capacity in the level service of a mate, who, having taken all he craved of her, left such altitudes of her being unexplored? As an individual might not her own soul hail its peer without blame? even acknowledge its need? Must the stars be veiled because to look upward was to find in them a glory to irradiate life that earth could not supply? Must a woman stoop instead of soar? Was it not wronging her immortal part to suppress the longing of the spirit for a

spirit answer? She quieted her heart at last by repeating the final message from one of those rare letters she no longer permitted herself to receive;—

“ With God no love is lost or goes unclaimed,
But bears some fruit in the eternal years.
Work on dear heart,—together though apart,
Nor shall we know this side the gate of death, the spheres
Wherein our kingdom lies,—nor yet how beautiful
Our mutual patient ministries have been!
While He from whom no secret can be hid, is working out
Through us, the glory of eternal ‘things unseen.’ ”

CHAPTER X

A BIRD FROM SICILY

ARE you calculating an eclipse, dear?" asked Arthur, looking up from his writing. "Or, if not, why do you sigh on such a perfect morning?"

"I wish I were, but not of a heavenly body. I am worried to death about Mary," said Alice earnestly.

"Why, what has Mary been doing? She seems to me beyond even English reproach!"

Alice regarded him fixedly, as if commenting in her own mind on the stupidity of man. "Are you obtuse purposely, dear?" she asked.

"No, I am not obtuse in any way, but Mary's crop of wild oats looks uncommonly like morning glories to me," he confessed.

"Have you never once noticed how attractive she is?"

"Yes, of course. Am I warmer now, as the children say?"

"No; you are at the frigid zone of ignorance; you are an explorer in arctic fields; you have reached the North Pole itself!"

"If you mean that most of the decent men here, myself included, admire her, I can come South several parallels at once. She has a way of growing dear—Mary has."

"Haven't you noticed any one admirer—an unremunerative one, too?"

Arthur thought a moment with a puzzled concentration. "Wrenski!" he cried. "He stares at her as if she were sheet music. Am I at the equator of the subject now?"

"No; you are in Labrador feeding the white bears, where you were all the time! It is Colonel Lyndon-Carr who is going to upset Mary and spoil her life unless some one interferes and does something right away to prevent it."

"Why should he spoil her life?" demanded Arthur blandly.

"If you were a woman you would see it all. A man who could go off on a sketching trip—of all maudlin entertainments!—with two women, one of whom was Lady Kintore,—a man at that who does not sketch, who endures it just to be near a girl like Mary; and then comes back and appears at a dance hall with a woman who dare not bow to the men she knows when they are with ladies!"

Arthur's face darkened satisfactorily at her climax. "I can sit right by you now; the equator begins to burn all around me."

"Equator? It is hell fire burning under this place everywhere. I shall be so glad to leave it, and take Mary to a place of safety, before she is singed to ashes; innocent little heart!"

This aspect of the situation was a new contingency. To minimise the danger became to the man more impor-

tant than to fly from it and all else that bound him here. "It would only be necessary to give Mary a faint hint of the Colonel's midnight capers, to open her eyes so that the rescue mission would hardly be called into service. Why don't you tell her you saw him at the Miralton the other night?"

"I did," admitted Alice, flushing gently as she recalled her effort to convince without wounding.

"How did she take it?"

"She said, 'How surprised he must have been to see *you* there!' She gave me the impression in a general way that if we had not been there we should not have been offended by the sight of him. She was perfectly cool, and I felt like a sneak who had told tales, and only helped the cause of the victim of my pains."

"You exaggerate the whole affair, poor dear. Take Live, and let love, for your motto and leave us all off your conscience for a change. The golf club is innocent enough, and we are all going out there to-day, you remember. That is a good substitute for green fields and sane pleasures. You won't be likely to meet any of the crew of the burning deck out there. You are not the only power interested to shield Mary; where is your faith in Providence?"

"With a precipice straight ahead one need not blame Providence for a catastrophe!" retorted Alice, who, being the partner of his joys, wished him to be equally the partaker of her fears.

Her heart was not amazingly set at peace under the balm of the open links, for they were late in starting and

the earlier golfers were far afield. Mary and the Englishman might as well have been looting in the garden of Eden, save for the caddy, who spoke no English, and was absorbing all his social energies in eating a large red apple, when not professionally engaged in chasing the ball. They were bravely away before Arthur, who passed them on a long drive, though they were ostentatiously waiting for him to overtake them, with their backs turned to the tee and their eyes presumably upon the waves.

"This is the first time I have felt really fit in an age," the Englishman was saying. "It is a rotten life here. A chap overeats and oversleeps and overdoes every sort of beastly thing. A chap can't be happy here, don't you know? It is only killing time, and the mark is too wide to be sport for a soldier."

"Vera and Comte de Hauteville are happy," objected Mary, in loyalty to her friends.

"But it is an indoor continental sort of happiness, you know; they don't ride or yacht or even motor in an open car. There's nothing of the sport about either of them. By Jove, I wish you could ride the country around Heathcote Hall with me this spring! The stables are not so bad; there is a tall chestnut mare that would be just your mount. I wish we could have one run together!"

Her eyes danced and sparkled in close imitation of the waves. This man was young; loved motion, air, light—his youth called her own.

"One is so jolly well at the heart of things in England—that's a life!" he declared, and suddenly the girl saw

in fancy the face of her waiting lover: mature, reverent, grave. Yet life contained this quickening of the pulse, and she felt a brief, chilly wonder if this was the nature of that strange and terrible thing called passion. What would it lead to, to run one run together? Where would it end? Ah, how opposedly his life and hers would run after—after a little! She almost gave a sigh as she recalled herself.

“I could not hunt,” she said aloud. “I should abet the fox. I hate so to have any live animal killed.”

“Foxes eat chickens. They are a pest in a way, you know.”

“I did not think about that side of it——”

“I am afraid you are not logical,” he hinted, but his eyes dwelt on her approvingly, as her face broke into its winsome infectious smile. Just then a bird, the first migrant from some Sicilian harbour of liquid name, more reckless than the other feathered exiles, tossed a tiny spray of irrepressible song to them from a bamboo thicket near by—an omen of summer.

“Do you mind human animals getting hurt in the same way?” he asked her, when the little troubadour had flown. “Big game like men, you know? They are always getting hunted down; it is part of the day’s work.”

“Not really,” contested Mary. “You are only making believe that life.”

“Out in Africa it was real enough. That’s the place to get a heartache bullied numb. Where blood is drink, danger is a quick settler for sentiment.”

"You will forget all this idling when you go back, I suppose."

"I can't say. By Jove, the men in the line aim straightest who have left one girl behind them to come back to dead or alive. They may forget their prayers, but they kiss her picture all the same, and it keeps them up to time. It's only logical."

"Are men always logical?" She did not permit him to finish his sentence before putting her gentle question.

"Don't you find them so?"

"Not always. If they were, why should they profess to admire fidelity and frankness and then amuse themselves with unworthy women?" Again her cruel directness had come to the surface. It staggered him. For a moment he felt as if a narrow ditch had opened before him into an impassable leap—or that a low hedge, easily taken, had risen up until coming a cropper was inevitable. He chose hastily the less ignominious horn of the dilemma and metaphorically dismounted, saying with a quick blush:

"'Single men in barracks don't grow into plaster saints.' You have me there; as you could everywhere if you cared to, you know. Do you know it? I have often wondered—I have spent quite a bit of time over it."

She was too startled by the soberness of his manner to notice the golf ball that dropped at her feet, until a derelict caddy planted himself beside it screaming—"Ici, m'sieur!" at the top of his lungs.

"It must be time for *déjeuner*," she urged in a half whisper, and led the way back to the club-house, with the

first constraint upon them they had ever felt in their irrelevant intercourse.

Vera and Paul were just arriving, notwithstanding which Lady Kintore was seconding Alice loudly in her aversion for Monte Carlo.

"A saint might be made at Monte Carlo out of sheer reaction, where a monastery had failed," she was asserting. "I am sure I had no idea of stopping on here. I wanted to settle for the winter in Rome, but my bad nephew vowed he never could stand the climate." The aggrieved note was becoming prominent now in her voice.

"There is a charming society there, I suppose," said Alice.

"It is very mixed, oh, deplorably mixed!" lamented Lady Kintore. "A large element of questionable foreigners; but incomparably better than this."

"More exclusive?"

"As to that, my dear, I can assure you if I hung a cutlet on my doorknob all Roman society would flock to nibble at it."

"It is a rotten old school for scandal too," interpolated Colonel Lyndon-Carr. "Every tongue is salted with a reputation and swings to and fro with envy, tale-bearing, and all uncharitableness."

"Are the Roman women clever? Do they write and all that sort of thing or only care for society?" Alice was interested in women and their conditions everywhere.

"They are not by way of being intellectual. I met

the authoress of 'Anima'—they made a lot of fuss over her, but the reception was just the ordinary chatter—a post mortem on man without even his corpse to enliven the dissecting-room. I believe they voted to abolish him at the end of the afternoon. She was considered very progressive and advanced for an Italian."

"But women do not yet dominate society—set the standards, I mean—do they?"

"The dissipated set do that; the smart and titled hesitate at nothing. I can assure you the boots of the young officers and nobles were to be seen outside their doors in the fashionable hotels till twilight!"

"Poor fellows," said Arthur. "They were probably firemen or policemen or kept a night lunch-car to eke out a gilded living, and had to sleep next day to make up."

"Well, rather not!" cried Lady Kintore, patronisingly.

"Oh, I say, you are chaffing now, aren't you?" echoed her nephew. "Men are not such a bad lot after all,"—glancing at Mary.

"We women are rather prone to think we have a monopoly of the virtues, because we suffer silently and sacrifice bravely and do not care for the grosser vices in the inherent nature of things." Lady Kintore had the floor and held it. "But sadly few of us have the complementary endowment that makes man our superior. Which of us here can compare in positive quality with the musical genius of Monsieur de Gaston, approach Comte de Hauteville with his brilliant gifts of intel-

lect, surpass my rebellious nephew with his powers of command, or match the creative instinct of Mr. Johnston?"

The men were loud in applause of their champion. As it died away Lady Kintore said to Mary, "The instant we leave the table I want to read your hand. I am interested in you all and I want to try my wizardry upon you."

"But surely you do not believe in it?" said Arthur.

"Why not? The nerves of the palm lie nearest the surface. 'God has placed signs in hands of all men that every man may know his work'—Job was good authority."

"It seems pagan to us, I suppose," began Alice, thoughtfully. "Signs and divinations are outgrown groping."

Paul de Hauteville listened to her critically. "But myself, I find it is imbecile to disregard a warning," he said. "Divination is the best the Greeks and Romans could draw from their religion. It is the best product of the religious idea, which has at all times possessed the human consciousness,—divinity and possibility of a spiritual rapport. The penetration of divine thought by human wisdom is only another name for modern psychology. Divination has for its province all that the human spirit cannot discover by itself."

"Do you go in for magic also?" asked Lady Kintore. "I should like most awfully to know what you think of that."

"No; that is only the art of producing effects contrary

to nature. I do not care for such, with the external accompaniments of grottos, and springs, telluric exhalations and the like; but, as Le Clerq says, divination has for its end a modification of human destiny by divine supplication."

"To what avail would you force the hand of coming evil?" protested Alice. "I would far rather divine what was latent in human beings and try to bring it out."

"Prescience, madame, as we understand it, means escape from destiny: unhappiness averted, hope changed to certitude."

"Destiny or necessity was a creation, however, before which even Zeus himself inclined," said Lady Kintore. Paul de Hauteville's interest quickened on discovering one of his audience informed on his favourite study. He turned to her now, deferentially recalling the words of Solon, "That which is once decided by destiny it is not in the power of presage or sacrifice to avert."

She bowed her stately head as if receiving a decree unalterable, but was immediately ready with her challenge.

"The Tuscan art of divination was more scientific."

"Their object was less to open the future than to stir the conscience," he acquiesced; "they observed heavenly signs; Etruscan augury used many birds,—the eagle notably, though all birds might give presages."

"Is that why we say a little bird told me?" asked Arthur idly.

"Have you forgotten the talking bird in the Arabian

Nights?" said Vera, reminding him of their old favourite with a smile.

"For a bird of the air shall carry the voice and that which hath wings shall tell the matter," repeated Lady Kintore. "Ecclesiastes declared it so."

"Every one admits the raven unlucky——" began Paul.

"And the stork the luckiest of all!" cried Lady Kintore.

"We have also, par example, the omen that when the cuckoo sings at noonday evil follows quickly after," suggested Henri de Gaston.

"Oh, cuckoo, shall I call thee bird, or but a wandering voice?" repeated Lady Kintore, her eyes half shut, and her head thrown back as if May in England were once more before her inward vision. "Wordsworth felt the mystery of the cuckoo when he wrote:

'To seek thee I did often rove
Through wood and on the green;
And thou wert still a hope, a love,
Still longed for, never seen!'

There was regret in every lingering accent of her voice as she recited the poem.

"A bird in the house also brings death," continued Paul.

"Are you a Roman Catholic?" asked Alice, as if trying to explain his superstitions.

"I am a fatalist," he answered coldly.

“ Clairvoyant fatalism would be madness ! ” exclaimed Lady Kintore, forgetting her cuckoo rapture in the promised joy of argument.

Paul de Hauteville shrugged as if the temptation was too impossible to resist. But he glanced at Vera, remembering her aversion to that contemptuous little gesture of the foreigner, so difficult to overcome because so wholly part of his natural expression.

“ Pagan fate and Christian foreordination—voilà ! where is the so great difference ? ” he enquired. “ Gods who could decree for *Œdipus* sins that he could not escape committing ; and a God who would lay upon Judas the eternal rôle of traitor ‘ that the scripture might be fulfilled ’ ? ”

Alice flushed hotly. “ Instead of desiring to know our future,” she cried, “ let us be for ever grateful that we believe our actions spring from our own wills, and that fatalism cannot dwarf our hopes, or augury stunt our best inspirations.”

“ But how to escape what the prophet calls the burden of the valley of vision ? ” asked Lady Kintore ; “ the song-weary sibyl begging to be excused from sooth-saying is merely an earlier form of the poet and artist, who must express, however he may long to evade.”

“ Destiny, Madame Johnston,” said Paul gravely, “ is greater than Zeus ; it is the inevitable. The gods themselves cannot preserve their hero from the common fate when the fatal Moere seizes upon him to plunge him into the profound sleep of death.”

“‘Man is his own star, and the soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man
Commands all light, all influence, all fate.’”

Alice quoted the lines bravely, but Paul perverted their conclusion by saying: “A star that sets when Fate ordains the darkness.”

“Your fatality dies at the foot of the Cross,” she argued. .

“Ah no! You are wrong to suppose it. Divination blent with the public life until 367 after Christ, the tripod was the emblem, the laurel wreath worn on great occasions. Sibylline prophecy was used to divert threatening catastrophe; their ceremonies were the supplication, the banquet, the games. Until the burning of Rome they were consulted, and play was a sibylline requirement.”

“At least they called away from idols,” suggested Vera softly.

“Longing to know is the curse of mankind!” confessed Lady Kintore, a weariness spreading over her handsome face that aged it unaccountably.

“The future life is the shield upon which the whole creation leans,” asserted Arthur with conviction.

“None is free but Zeus,” Paul continued. “My fatality is a force of inexorable justice, not blind antique destiny: when a man rushes to his destruction the gods aid him in his fall; but I do not despise augury, amulet or portent to prevent.” His manner became one of habitual lightness, as he suddenly realised, and regretted,

that his reserve had fallen before the charm of his subject.

Alice, incredulous of such superstition, in its very presence, could not drop the topic.

"You do not really believe in dreams, do you?" she asked.

"But why not? Homer declared the dreams of the morning to be especially trustworthy; but Theocritus says of dreams of the third watch, 'when the flock of true dreams fares wandering.'"

Vera was glad to have Paul drawn out, though a little sorry for the direction the conversation had taken. He was a man predisposed to the occult, but he had many other funds of erudition too, and might have drawn upon them with less chance of disfavour from these recent acquaintances. Doubtless they thought him a mere trifler, and now would probably despise him for dabbling in the supernatural, all unaware of his serious attainments.

She responded to Arthur's restless movement away from the table with all possible grace.

Lady Kintore, sticking to her text, read their hands singly, a little withdrawn. The group soon gathered about them on the terrace outside, overlooking the sea, with the cloudless sky and a coast line of rough but luxuriant verdure. To Alice, whose mount of Jupiter was in the ascendant, she gave will-power, noble ambition, happy marriage and religion; an inheritance line; and far behind, a serious illness.

"You have perplexity and illness too, before you," Lady Kintore summed up. "But you will always pre-

vail. You have a sea-voyage coming soon. There is trouble—you have two love affairs, one recent,—at least it is here in your palm,” she added, as if in apology.

To Vera she declared less. Grace, riches, æsthetic gifts were hers, with music predominant. The mount of the sun was in excess, naturally, showing extraordinary talent. “A star in the palm means that some one of the other sex is to cause you great trouble,” she said,—“great joy but great suffering. The fate line is broken——” she stopped short.

“Please go on,” said Vera. Their eyes met; those of the older woman were startled.

“What does the broken fate line mean?” asked Vera calmly.

“Widowhood,” said Lady Kintore.

Last of all she took up Mary’s little palm affectionately. The lines of the others had unnerved her a bit; bad hands to read they were, hinting of evil things. This one was fairer.

“Venus is in predominance, dear, just as it should be and as I had hoped!” she proclaimed fondly. “Here is domestic happiness for you, constancy in love, a happy marriage; the health line double, the triple bracelet; all to make it what the books call the happy hand. But oh, my heart! Well, upon my word, this is surprising! You have had several affairs of the heart, one of which is to culminate almost immediately in marriage!”

Mary’s colour was pretty to see.

“Well, I say!” reiterated Lady Kintore, putting her arm around the girl, and drawing her back to the rest.

Here's a pretty piece of occultism for you,—this little girl is going to be married shortly! What bird has been singing it here and we did not divine the omen?"

Her face belied the playfulness of her words, and the tyrannical expression lay near the surface of her smile, which was rather forced. She regarded Mary as her own especial perquisite, resenting the least claim of any other. It was no part of her plan to have her nephew either included in or omitted from the concerns of the unimportant little American with her morning face. Like all self-appointed directors of the universe she hated to be baffled by the object of her guardianship. She might abdicate but she would never be dethroned. By some strange coincidence the thoughts of two of her present listeners reverted simultaneously to the little migrant from Sicily!

"A little bit of all right; eh?" said the colonel to his heart.

However late Paul might return to the villa Vera was always in the mood for making fête with him. The dead of night saw many a clandestine feast, and heard many a tender word between the two, who were always lovers. However the day and its amusements might separate, fate had thus far ordained that night should bring back heaven and the stars.

To-night they had been speaking again of the Americans. She took him to task lightly for his estimate of Alice

"I find her hard," Paul said slowly, as if trying to

define his antagonism; "she lacks tendresse, sympathy. It is not marvellous that the husband finds an intoxication in you, by contrast."

"She is too devoted," drawled Vera. "It is very bad for men,—it demoralises them. She is spoiling Arthur."

"She is very—how do you say it?—the reverse of egoiste?"

"Unselfish, you mean? Au contraire, cher amie, I find it is we who are unselfish, who allow ourselves to be spoiled, and man's development to be accomplished through their devotion to us," she protested. "Through our service men find their own souls—at the expense of ours, and we are really the sacrifice in the end."

"He will not play," said Paul abruptly, apropos of nothing at all.

"Who? Arthur?"

"I can not understand him,—so gay, such appetite for life,—but play? Non! Absolument non! Comprends pas——" he shrugged resentfully.

"You are not so stupid as you pretend,—you do not need an explanation," said Vera. "It is his wife. He has promised her, naturally. Arthur is a product of America's sole civilisation,—a wife-made man. She is doing what they used to call at home 'working out her own salvation'—and his too at the same time, through him."

"And he permits her?"

"He does not arrive at any given crossway in time to prevent her. She foresees, she guards and obstructs; no unseen emergency ever finds her dreaming. Arthur has

hurt his health trying to keep pace with her ambitions for him, trying to be the man she would be if she were in his place."

"And the bon Dieu and the omnipotent Fate?"

"Do not come into the combiration unless it is her will that they should."

"But if it is, in her manner, love that makes all this, is not love also in America blind?"

"Blind! To her it has a thousand thousand eyes! She is not a woman to allow herself to be lost in love's country,—she will always know her way out. Her compass would never waver from her conscience. She is very, very clever, Paul. Don't cross swords with her; be warned by me, par exemple."

"Pas necessaire," he replied moodily.

Vera came to him and threw one arm gently over his shoulder; one of her shadow kisses fell upon his hair.

"Do you love me, Paul?"

He kissed the wrist nearest his lips. "Vera—can you ask it?"

"Then listen to me. Do not have any affairs with Arthur Johnston. He is generous; a spendthrift to his finger tips"—opening her hand wide to express prodigality—"but his wife is of another type, and for my sake do not be too amiable to the mari. Seriously, Paul, I mean it."

"Seriously, mignonne, I give you my promise. For the moment my lucky star is in eclipse, and debts of honour do not wait. If he played——"

"How you adore it!" She did not say it in reproach,

but with the intensity of interest that was aroused in her inmost vitality by everything about him.

“Play is your only rival, you know, *ma chérie!*”

“An increasingly costly one, too, I am afraid. If you will not take Arthur to the Cercle, except as a spectator. I will give you a wonderful surprise to-morrow night.”

“*C'est entendu,*” he cried unhesitatingly. They lifted their glasses on the compact. “To-morrow my luck returns!” vowed Paul. “I shall play on my favourite day, the thirteenth, at the thirteenth hour and minute precisely. Luck reverses for those of sufficient daring; I win when all the world fears to lose. It was Lord Byron who said for me, that dates were the post-houses where the Fates change horses—making history change its tune!”

CHAPTER XI

DEBTS OF HONOUR

IN vain did Alice give Mary innumerable opportunities for confidence; no confidence came. She seemed as unreserved as before the eventful disposition of her fate by Lady Kintore; no more quiet, no less light of heart. As chaperon Alice was compelled by duty to take care of her; as woman she was vividly curious over the details of her progress with Colonel Lyndon-Carr. His devotion had been patent from the first, yet Alice wavered between fear for Mary's ultimate happiness and her own legitimate love of matchmaking.

Many an echo had been wafted her concerning his too evident enjoyment of frivolous gaiety, and frank frequentings of society beyond the pale of that of Mary Ingram; but these aspersions had been easily traced to American sources, usually to those more or less soured by the failure of their own ambitions or envious of Mary's success. Yet not one of these audacious insinuations carried a hint of positive evil, or of a life immoral beyond the careless pleasure of the hour. With this assurance Alice parried the attacks of periodic misgiving that assailed her—everywhere—in the midst of many a brilliant function—or lay in wait for her at the grey hour of early waking, before coffee had restored the world to equilibrium.

At last she appealed to Arthur. "Why not ask Wrenski what he hears of the colonel?" she had suggested. "Not as if he were an information bureau; but as a man of the world who knows everybody and his habits. Why not have a conversation with him on the general life of Monte Carlo, and lead around gradually to the case in point?"

"Have a conversation with Wrenski!" exclaimed Arthur. "He is one of the people you have to operate upon for conversation!"

The only hint she had of what was going on behind the clear blue eyes of her little charge was a chat overheard between Arthur and Mary that ran thus:

"Why don't you make your heroes and heroines all mixed up?" she asked rather wistfully. "Some good and some bad in them all, I mean, as they are in real life? There is Vera, now, so brilliant and so wonderful, who never goes to church. And the Comte de Hauteville, who is a man of no profession, although he is fitted for almost any distinction, yet who believes in fate more than God, and who influences people through his own personal fascination. I never can tell among these people over here which is which: I admire the wrong one and dislike the very person I ought to admire. Take Lady Kintore: sometimes I think she is hard, cruel even, beside being tyrannical, yet somehow I love her and pity her." She did not include Lady Kintore's nephew in her analysis; her omission was to Arthur significant.

"Why don't you put Lady Kintore in a book?" She leant forward, as if inspired.

Arthur raised his hands in despair. "Why, Bonnie Brier, if I put our Tiberius into a book she would draw blood and set off explosives all the way through and leave it on fire at the last page!"

Mary laughed deliciously, but her eyes remained unconvinced.

"No, seriously, why is it? All your novels make it easy to see the good and the evil, the hero and the villain; to separate the tragedy from the comedy,—or the farce, as it may be, of the plot; but here I see every day the villain doing admirable things and the hero doing—well, weak things at least. Why is it?"

"It is because God is a greater tragedian than I," said Arthur humbly. "He is the only supreme realist."

Did this mean that the contradictions in one man's nature were tormenting their dear little friend? Alice longed to speak, but prudence held her back. She understood how repugnant it is to the young to know their romance observed, and how yesterday and to-day reverse the judgments of us all, overthrow idols, teach us to adore and belittle in turn. It seemed to her that she detected an actual avoidance of the Englishman on Mary's part, but that might have arisen from two motives absolutely opposite: one of attraction too markedly realised; one from a determination to stand aloof. Whatever might have been the provocation, he had departed on a sensational motor trip over the mountains to Turin, with a party whose proclivities were only too well known.

Vera, looking on from a distance, knew better than

Alice that a glance, a different smile, a more seductive movement, though of a less perfect figure, alone is needed to stimulate a new desire in man, to the exclusion of the most exalted friendship. She commiserated the ingenue, for though she believed the illegitimate passions incapable of bringing happiness, she was aware of their fugitive charm over the hearts of men. Colonel Lyndon-Carr was of the type whose career had never excited so much as her languid comment before, utterly indifferent as she was to the general welfare. Once only she ventured a distant query, and Mary's reply had been without evasion, "I have not seen him of late."

Vera raised her eyebrows incredulously,—he had been away only a day or two at that time.

"It is my own fault partly," said the girl hastily. "I am very sorry. I think I offended him by too blunt a remark the day we were at the Golf Club for breakfast; put in words it sounded worse than I expected it to!" She added in his extenuation: "Indeed it must have sounded rude; but I did not mean it so, and I will apologise for it the first time I see him."

Vera quickly gave her a bit of general worldly advice, as brief as it was misleading, accentuating every syllable. "Never apologise, Mary! No man wishes to admit that a woman has been rude to him; it is an insult to his amour propre. He will sooner forgive ill-temper, even cruelty!"

Mary followed this novel social evangel, though it was at variance with her own direct lack of method in her dealings with mankind. Vera never thought of the dere-

lict colonel again, Paul having eliminated every other man from her consciousness.

The anxiety of his present difficulties more than ever absorbed her, and in her longing to relieve the immediate pressure upon him she had recurred to her diamond chain with increasing resolution. She had pledged Paul not to involve Arthur in play on the chance of being able to realise temporarily on this latest extravagance, and it was with a double mixture of elation and reluctance that she made a short journey over to Nice, a place whither countless great ladies before her had gone for succour and secrecy in financial storms.

Although plainly dressed and unattended, her caste was recognised in a certain shop from the moment of her entrance. The "Ah, oui, miladi!" was spoken with the utmost respect, as the chain was taken to a superior authority on the second story for examination and valuation. The estimate that came back was repeated to her without a trace of emotion:

"Very pretty, very good imitation; but bijoux faux, madame. Old paste carefully selected; the setting admirable, but—inadequate for any such loan as madame had desired."

Could they show madame some choice pearls? Comtesse de Reivillon had tired of her emeralds—the ladies were all so fickle, were they not? They had just reset them—thus. It was a pleasure to show them—no trouble, only a pleasure. Here was also a remarkable piece, this horseshoe of diamonds, large enough quite to fill the corsage; not in good taste, it was true, perhaps, but a

caprice of La Fleurière, whose horse won the Prix de Paris last week, owing to the failure of the Duc d'Enghien.

Vera gave each successive jewel as much attention as if her own world had not suddenly dropped out of creation's setting before her eyes. With equal discrimination she praised or blamed. "These diamonds showed a flaw in the cutting; those were superb." "The pendant of the English miladi was a dream—a true marvel of good taste." "She herself had been infamously cheated in the matter of her chain, it appeared; she should acquaint the house of the villainy of their salesman without delay." For the instant she deceived them as well as herself, but without deceiving an awful blank in her heart. The eyes of the great La Roux were on her approvingly as she left the shop and entered her hired cab. He saw many comedies and tragedies, too, enacted before him in the course of each season, yet this impressed him unduly, and he was conscious of respecting the nerve of this beautiful victim-client as profoundly as a jewel merchant of Nice is capable of respecting anything but money, and the gems money can buy.

As the English clerk turned to resume his accustomed occupations he glanced toward his patron for confirmation of his own suspicions. The great La Roux did not deign him so much as a change of countenance as he remarked gravely: "Rome has served others as they have served her. It is fortunate it matters nothing to a woman of such distinction," and left the clerk to wonder at his leisure which of them had made a false reckoning.

Vera was glad to be out of the shop and alone. For a continental woman this is an unusual enough privilege, too. Gratefully would she have dismissed her cab and leant a while with the unknown multitudes over the railing, above the sea, rolling interminably green, save where a streak of purple toward the west denoted the confluence of the river Var. Convention restrained her. To be perhaps recognised here on foot and alone—for the wife of Comte de Hauteville it was inconceivable, impossible! She had completely lost her American birthright of independence. Even in so slight a matter she felt the compulsion of Paul's expectation of her. Her freedom of action was gone; yes, and her interest in it and in everything else disconnected with Paul himself. His effect on her was not of so much moment in regard to the externals; she could spare them far better than emotions, but had he not exhausted her enthusiasms and betrayed her sense of values? God never meant a woman to be subject to such bondage. She was worse than a slave in her passion for this man. It degraded his individuality, degraded her very illusion; her mind was in chains and did not want to be set free. Given Truth or Paul, she knew she should choose Paul. She knew he had supplanted natural ties, erased friendship; all unconsciously submerged her until there was no activity in her day not exercised solely in relation to him. If this affair of the jewels spoke truly he was unworthy of her, yet she clung to him as an idol. Men call such adherence "womanly." Women know it is the crucifixion of the divine in their souls on the cross of lower passions.

"Love is terrible!" her heart cried out. "Love is the most unprincipled force of an all-powerful Providence." Vera knew it to-day for the first time. H  l  ne was born to it, Alice dimly apprehended it; even Mary had it to learn, was learning it already. Vera turned her eyes upon the crowd about her to regain her command.

Under the drooping palms of the garden behind her the band was playing the love song from the "Herodiade," Salome's appeal thrilling the soft air with "puis je vivre sans toi!" Motionless, as in a stage setting, hung the boats in the offing. From the Jet  e Promenade, built out over the sea, came strains of an orchestra disputing with the waves for right to be heard. Both band and orchestra were audible in turn to the crowd that idled between, moving in leisurely enjoyment of the hour.

The violins were repeating the aria from "Sampson and Delilah," and the light skirts and fabulously high heels moved even more slowly up and down, their wearers leaning even more languidly upon the arms of their companion idlers. No type was lacking here. All nations of the earth and some hard to account for within the known confines, were represented. The dogs that followed their human friends were a bench show in themselves. Russian deer-hounds, Spanish poodles, Italian "poms" and the adorable Boston bull all sedately took their constitutional on a sunny day along the Riviera, among their French playfellows with or without a pedigree.

When the band played the "Siegfried" fire music, it

drifted and glistened and burned over the waves till the veins of the listeners swelled with the "zäuberei" that cannot be translated by mere enchantment. The Americans applauded noisily, and the Germans wiped their eyes; to them it was always "himmelische," always the rapture of that awakening kiss that flushes the common day to rose colour. Surroundings cannot vulgarise nor humanity deprave their native art. In a café or dance hall the German will let his coffee go cold as he hears the notes of the Vaterland flowing out to him; the Lorelei will never fail to overcome him as he sits with closed eyes the better to follow the lyric of his beloved Rhine.

At last Vera realised the hour. "To the station," she commanded hastily. The cocher, straightening himself with a jerk, bore her away; the strains of the band following her more and more remotely as they drove.

She sat looking rigidly out of the window of the train, seeing nothing that passed before her, and only half aware that as it started another voyageur had entered the compartment. All her being was centred on one word: Paul. What was he hiding from her? Had he been false only to be kind? Why had he kept his emergency from her, whatever its nature? How had she failed to make him understand the abandon of her devotion to him?

She did not turn from the window even as the train plunged with a shriek into the long tunnel and came out again into the sea-gleam and sunshine. The transition caused her no delight. To her astonishment the other occupant of the carriage, a woman, spoke.

"Pardon, Madame la Comtesse—it is la Comtesse de Hauteville, is it not? I do not deceive myself, I am as-

sured !”—Vera’s face remained non-committal. “ Pardon, madame, je vous en prie,” continued the low voice. “ pardon the intrusion of one—to you a stranger, but a very well remembered acquaintance of your husband the Comte de Hauteville. For so intruding he is my excuse ; en effet, believe me, my concern is not only for him——”

Vera’s heart beat thick and her manner stiffened at once. It was indeed a break in her usual life, this escapade abroad unprotected. She regretted it bitterly. How Paul would disapprove it.

“ I am Madame Prévile. You will not have heard him speak of me,” she hastened to add, as Vera’s increasing withdrawal became evident to her. “ Listen, I beg of you. Once I was indebted to him for a favour supreme, now it is my opportunity. He has lost of late and I have begged him to permit me to assist him for the moment. It is no sacrifice to me to do this ; but no—he refuses always. It is so like him ! but it is solely for your sake, because of you and——”

Vera glanced toward the door. It was closed.

“ Tranquillise yourself, Madame la Comtesse,” said Héléne Prévile ; “ it is an express, je vous assure,—one stop only. Have patience, this is an encounter given me by the bon Dieu. To ask you to come to any appointed rendezvous was impossible. That you should receive me, pas convenable. Having acquaintance then with the situation so painful of M. le Comte, I sent to you a little billet by hand, at the Prix de Paris, after the failure of the Duc d’Enghien. You have made me no response—have chosen to ignore my effort——”

Again Vera’s eyes sought the door as if in immediate

need of air. They would reach Beaulieu in five minutes now, when she could leave the carriage. But the actress had foreseen this and taken her own precautions.

"But of my note,—it was received; yes?" she persisted.

"Beaulieu! Beaulieu!" shouted the guard. Vera rose. "It is true that I am the Comtesse de Hauteville," she said coldly; "but I have received no communication from any one of your name, which, allow me to add, is entirely unknown to me—except in your professional reputation."

She laid her hand eagerly on the door now. It was locked.

Hélène Prévile folded her hands with a shrug of open defiance. "It was arranged with the guard and the official. We shall not fear interruption until Monte Carlo. C'est déjà quelque chose. Do not derange yourself madame; this interview was accorded by the bon Dieu, as I have told you. Ecoutez,—it is serious, this of which I speak. Once a girl in Paris gave herself to buy the bien être of Paul de Hauteville. Sold herself, you understand, to reinstate him because,—oh, because he had been dear to her. Au lieu de raconter de bêtise," she said aside. "Imagine to yourself if she will now permit him to lose in the game of life? Because of a caprice of honour? No!"

The comédienne who made men laugh from one end of France to another was not enacting comedy to-day; her clear voice was husky with feeling repressed, her face as set as that of Vera.

"To you, his wife, he gives all, even his last chance of

safety. It is in your hands to make him accept deliverance. Let no weak jealousy or scruple ill-timed prevent a magnanimous action! The girl who saved him once is a rich woman to-day, in wealth legitimately earned through art and power and fidelity of soul to her first and only love. Do not draw back, Madame la Comtesse. I shall not contaminate—only do not refuse! Do not refuse!”

Paul in danger? His safety, his reputation, perhaps, dependent upon this stranger, a rival, a woman dear to Paul in memory perhaps, as part of his youth? She was stunned, confused, hard as she strove to comprehend what had happened.

“Nom de Dieu, do not refuse me!” begged the voice. “It is so little to give—only your pride—and it is his honour, his life——”

“His honour—life?” echoed Vera meaninglessly. She could not make the words explain themselves connectedly.

“Paul is superstitious,” insisted the voice, sounding far away to Vera now; “he believes too faithfully in omens, stars, signs. Forget yourself,—save him by so slight a renunciation! If succour does not soon arrive to him it will be ‘fini!’ ‘Fini!’” she cried despairingly.

Monaco already. Was it some dreadful dream? Vera made a superhuman effort to throw off the horror and speak calmly.

“If my husband has, as you imply, made losses, it need not touch his honour or his life. You excite yourself unnecessarily for his welfare, madame. There are other re-

sources open to him of which you are uninformed; no evil can occur to him beyond a temporary annoyance."

As the train slowed down in its approach to the station at Monte Carlo, Hélène Prévile gave a dry sob that would have been of professional value to her on any stage. "At last, madame, is it that you do not know, that you have not seen his hand?" she implored. "It was read for him in Paris long ago. He has the line of sudden death, the life line broken in both palms at thirty-five exactly. He knows it well. He never forgets it. He knows the secrets of all occult mysteries; he awaits his fate. Kill him if you will, drive him to despair and death! Do it! But yours is not the love of a Frenchwoman, who gives life, honour, all, to protect the man she adores!"

As if the peaceful scene were again spread before her Vera saw in a flash the grassy golf lawn, the lazy sea, and heard again her own voice asking, "What does the broken fate line mean?" and the startled reply of Lady Kintore, "Widowhood."

What shroud was this that was enveloping her in the midst of youth and sunlight? The guard was unlocking the door. She was alone. She tottered like a woman recovering from a severe illness as she made her descent from the train.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE WAVES

FOR the first time in her life Vera was not ready to meet Paul. Hitherto, after even the briefest parting, there had always been a thrill in looking forward to their reunion. "It is always as the first time for me," Paul had often declared; "a desire as ardent, and unsatisfied." But to-day it was different. She felt guilty, as if she had betrayed her husband. To her sensitive consideration in matters of the heart, the very fact of having learned his secret from another, however unwillingly it had been forced upon her, was a crime toward love and loyalty. The circumstance, she felt, had put her in the wrong. Yet even the realisation of his deceit toward her could not quench the burning sense of injustice at his silence. All their life would now seem built on falsehood and unhappiness. She had defrauded another of Paul even as she herself had been defrauded of his love, that passionate love which she had imagined sprang for her alone. The mere question of the diamonds was as a trifle in comparison with the shock of Madame Prévile's triple revelation.

Paul alone could reassure her now—Paul, from whom

her impulse was to fly and hide herself, lest he prove powerless after all to dispel these spectres.

If he had deceived her from the first, she could never believe him again. He should not cajole her. She was determined to stand firm; he should find her a woman where he had left an adoring child. And through all her greater affliction was the pin prick of disappointment at her own failure in Nice. If she had been able, magnificently, by the sale of her diamond chain, to stand before Paul as the redeemer of his losses, magnanimous toward his past, triumphant in her present power; if she could have given and forgiven royally, her own position would have been more strong; but to owe protection to another, and to such another as *Hélène Prévile*; to stand helpless and betrayed before him from whom she could not conceal the least beat of her heart; to accept whatever shattered joys their life together might henceforth yield—this was insufferable. For a superb immolation, a dramatic part in life, she might have been grateful; but merely to accept the sacrifice of another was galling.

In her strange shyness and longing she had ignored the chance of meeting her American friends descending from the same train; indeed *Mary Ingram* was close to her before *Vera* had noticed the girl's presence. *Alice* followed less eagerly. They, too, had been at Nice for the afternoon, it seemed, and returning had been fated to witness a painful tragedy; a girl of sixteen, in despair at her lover's desertion, had thrown herself under their train. *Mary* looked ill at the mention of the incident,

and Alice vented her own horror to Vera as they climbed together the steep stairway leading up through the Casino gardens.

"The carnival may have been different in those early days, when even Kings wanted to join it, incognito. It has degenerated to mere license now," she protested.

"They are as children in their pleasure over it," Vera said in excuse. She felt she must offer something, though she was not listening, and did not really hear what the other said.

Alice's eyes flashed.

"Ah, but they are not children," she cried. "It is one wild debauch; and the press sanctions it by articles describing the orgies of music and flowers, the abandon and sensuous languor; and by their advertisements too. 'Une jolie blonde wishes to make the acquaintance of a Monsieur of esprit; object,—plaisir de carnival.'"

"Her dream is finished," murmured Vera still more absently. Oddly enough she was more in affinity with that poor girl under the wheels of the train than with this vigorous American denouncing the institutions of society. Against her indifference Alice had, as she had had before, the impression of talking to herself.

"You take it all too seriously," began Vera, not wishing to be rude to Arthur's wife; but Alice interrupted her mournfully:

"A human soul is a pretty serious matter. Arthur once said that as a child you had a solemn-hearted way of looking at life. You must have changed."

Vera's laugh sounded harshly, even to her own ears.

"Was I a very serious child? I suppose so. Over here we treat things lightly, till they actually become so. All these butterflies, that flutter and fascinate at carnival times, fly away in due season. There are always more lives to lose, and more hearts to break."

"One victim of the habit of treating everything lightly will never fly away again," said Alice, with tears filling her eyes. "Her poor mangled body held the dignity of death incongruously enough too. It is grisly,—this pleasure of theirs."

"It is love;—*que voulez vous?*" commented Vera dispassionately. "Like the poet before her, even this human moth could boast:

' My glass is not large—
But I drink in my glass.'

"Ah, but love is not everything—such love as this!" protested Alice, shaken with the falseness of it all. "There is art in the world, music"—she paused abruptly, for work and duty she felt held no lure for Vera. The great impersonal beauty and charm of life made no appeal to her.

Meanwhile Vera was walking on impatiently enough. Art would not have existed for her if Paul's existence ceased. Music was Paul; of him and from him and for him and because of him. This unpremeditating moth of the carnival, so wrong and wicked in the eyes of Alice Johnston, caused in Vera's soul no revolt; rather claimed her sympathy. She knew how a man could be so much to a woman that she had no life or will apart from him,

The key was in her own breast to the mystery of this other's misery and despair, though to Alice the door itself was inaccessible.

The cold breath of such a life as Alice had been inviting her to contemplate chilled her to her marrow. To whatever depths life might degenerate with Paul, her fate was with him. She must rise or sink with the tides of his destiny. Because she was a woman and because Love had laid its violent claims upon her, this man was her sun and moon. The Red Sea might roll over her, as over horses and chariots of old, as she had seen it submerge many another one here at Monte Carlo; but it should overwhelm them together, their arms locked. Paul's smile her flash of past and future heaven in the midst of the catastrophe.

All the while Alice was volubly pitying the poor creature who had gone to her death in her faulty frailty, in Vera's soul a new allegiance was singing up to action. That there were many diversities of love, but that all meant sacrifice, was the trend of her resolution. She sought to disengage herself from her companions as suavely as possible. They naturally wished to linger, for the bands were playing on the terrace, but she, bent on new immolation, beckoned a prowling cab, and drove home to her villa.

She had other jewels of course. She went directly to her own room, where was the small safe that held the least used valuables of the household, and without removing her hat or veil she began her eager inventory. She could save Paul yet, unassisted.

One after another she drew the cases from their hiding places. One after another she searched them through,—in vain: all had been emptied of the contents. No burglar could have been before her, for silver and many bits of her jewellery still lay scattered about on her toilette-table. What could it mean? She stood regarding the empty boxes, white-lipped and with strained breath. Then some one knocked. Could it be Paul?

Like a person detected in a crime she swept from sight every trace of her recent occupation, and standing as if in the act of removing her hat before the glass, she gave permission to enter. She was unprepared. He was taking her at a terrible disadvantage; her heart beat painfully against her side. But in response to her brief "Entrez," only the respectful François stood before her, his grey head deferentially bent.

"Pardon, Madame la Comtesse. Monsieur le Comte is gone out. He came to seek Madame la Comtesse, and waited as long as he was able. He has commanded me to say that Madame la Comtesse shall not await him to-night. It will not be possible for him to return until to-morrow."

Vera struggled to conceal her agitation. Paul had never left her so before.

"Bien," she said coolly; then, as François backed toward the door: "Monsieur le Comte left no written word for me?"

"No, madame. Monsieur le Comte was très pressé," replied François reassuringly, and left the room, his grave face a shade more care-worn than was customary

with even this faithful and long-suffering servitor of the noblesse.

The next moment the villa suddenly seemed to stifle her. With a return of the instinct of her childhood, when, with no human mother, she had turned to Nature in her time of trouble, she let herself out of the garden gate unobserved, and hurried down the cliffs to the winding path beneath. She walked blindly on until she reached the gates of a deserted garden and villa that had once belonged to a relative of Paul. It was a little paradise, the secret of whose entrance, by a spring concealed under the iron grille bearing the fanciful name "Villa des Vagues," had been entrusted to her by special favour. She could not have said what she sought here in its solitude, unless it was freedom from the eye both of servant and of friend. For the disappearance of her jewels she cared nothing. Paul had given them to her; she would have given them back a thousand times to secure his peace of mind. It was the newly aroused terror lest her fears of him should find confirmation that deprived her of the power of all consecutive thought or resolve.

What if it were true,—what if it were true! And if this Héléne still loved him, would he abandon himself to her entreaty, touched by the magnitude of her devotion? But Vera had forgotten one resource. She could go to Arthur. She too could turn love to good account. Love should save them all. Arthur was an American, the soul of chivalry. He would not misinterpret or defame. He was loyal and pure. Héléne should not get Paul beneath her yoke. The very money she, Vera, had pre-

vented Paul from getting out of Arthur at play, she would ask him frankly to lend to her. No dishonour could attach to a wife's effort to save her husband from dishonour—and such was the alternative represented by the offer of Héléne Prévile. Yet that Paul would never sanction this she knew, even while she assuaged her misery with the sudden hope.

She walked on and on, baffled and dismayed, following moss-grown avenues arched over with laurestina and leading to deep pools in antique stone basins, where the green water stood mysteriously hushed, or dripped from fountains fed by rivulets from the upper hillsides. Old statues hung with ivy looked leagues away over sea and sky, standing on esplanades from which stone stairways led down to tiers of fountained gardens just above the azure level of the Mediterranean. A lake in the garden reflected every bend of the cypress trees as they bent in the evening wind, or swayed with the dark fervours of their own genuflections—those hypnotic trees, that stand alone, like resurrected Pagans, in funereal companies, throughout Italy, wrapping their togas of silence about them, desolate and regretful.

It was a place and hour for lovers' footfalls; for sighs and vows of eternal passion; a place for the immortal loves of poets, the wooing of the first man and the first woman, not for ascetic communion with God, or wrestlings with trouble. The olive trees, twisted by sirocco and worn by the eddyings of uncounted years, were patterned into lace by the light from sun or moon; and even so early in the year, summer's light foot had crossed the

grass and left the violets as tokens of her passing. Already the birds were calling in a plaintive tuning for the full performance later among the budding trees.

In such a place, at the hour when the gay world of vanity was flocking to cafés and casino, Vera threw herself down and pressed her whole figure against the soft sod, as she might once have lain upon the breast of her young mother, so long dead.

When the first burst of tears was spent, she let the palms lure her eyes upward to their hanging gardens, and the violet perfumes win her back to earth and childish memories—let spring embrace her in its ageless charm. The dampness of the twilight warned her to her feet at last, and ascending by terrace on tangled terrace she gained the summit of the gardens. Even here passion lay underneath the peace. Something repelled her confidence. A sentiment of the dramatic pervaded it all. Such solace as it gave was all for the sophisticated, contrived for subtle and jaded spirits who needed the world even in retreat. It did not heal. It was, if one may so speak of Nature, a profane beauty, unhallowed by a sense of the divine. Byzantine perfumes mingled with the cool of myrtle leaves; the Asiatic camellia disdained the scented speech of humbler sisters, rearing herself arrogantly perfect. A bronze archer, life size, seen through a cunning vista, drew his bow over a bed of blood-red flowers. Stupors of the desert and the slow gliding Nile were in the tropical foliage.

Vera leaned over a stone balustrade that had been set to restrain the reckless or the too enamoured from walk-

ing off into the spaces of cypress, olive and orange tree-tops underneath. Here the vision broke all confines; soared to white-capped peaks or dived to touch the breast of the waves and float upon the distant waters like some wing-weary bird; turned toward the Orient, or West toward castles in Spain according to the gazer's mood. Vera's resentment and fatigue were melted and diffused in this enfolding beauty of the old villa; the love of her life could never be dissociated from it all.

The colours of parting day were concentrating in the West, the whole heavens flushing as if with the sensitive hues of spring flowers. Faint greens as of the first crocus blades, budding lilacs and eager jonquils, and the shy pink of azalias, deepened by the tender mood of Nature into a gorgeous masque of glory, were caught and reflected by the sea in luminous opalescence. It was almost as if the Goddess of Dawn retraced her auroral way across the waters—"The first leap of the sea toward night," followed swiftly the fugitive after-gleams, slipping imperceptibly from daffodil to grey, from rose to darkness. The evening shadow hastened into dark, that the bending sky might see its stars once more upon that undulating bosom.

As the light sank away, one last overwhelming sob shook Vera's frame, with the reflection that for her too, perhaps, the sun had set and the radiant hours were never to return. What if a desolate Afterward were her only destiny? But no—Love defiant, reasserted itself in its might. If Paul were unworthy, still she loved him. He was hers. Such love could not be worthless in the

scheme of things; there was nothing of good but must exist continuedly. If she clung to Paul now for no other reason, she was grateful to him for teaching her the pain and happiness of that true love, without which a woman's life is as flowerless as a nettle in the sand. The cry that comes at some time to most lovers was hers—If death had only snatched one of them from the other before the dream was broken! It was the immemorial cry of a woman, with no one to hear her or console. She remembered it used to be said to her that God was love. It must then be Fate that had prepared this evil, punishing her as for a crime for having dared to be so happy.

An awaking sense of time and the conventions came to her, as she turned away from the sunset and looked down the steep path to the waves. Just above their beckoning arms the crescent moon lay golden upon the rim of the horizon. It hung at the end of the dusky path as if waiting for some one. For whom? For her, perhaps, how should one know? Involuntarily she started down to meet it. One of the dishevelled cactuses that demoralise the Riviera scenery at every point, caught at her gown to detain her, and she stood a moment transfixed, staring off at the still glowing water. How near oblivion was! A little instant—the moon waited. Only a step lay between oneself and the endless dream. Why should she wait for any tarnishing of the bright escutcheon of love, delay for the blunting of truth's weapons? As if clairvoyant she saw her own white face and huddled shape upon the waves—already.

Indeed life held nothing for her without Paul. The little moth who had thrown herself under the train for love's sake had lived no poem like hers, and yet the moth had had the courage and wisdom to know when final night overtook her. Vera had heard Paul applaud the Greeks, "dead at the climax." Life had already come to her "with both hands full." Her breath was cramped for the past that would never be hers again,—that was gone never to be renewed. Duty and truth made a coward of her. Love made the heart fearless as with the wine of happiness. She would go out on the waves,—far out, where the sunset ended and the night began.

She started downward, but the obstructing cactus was unrelenting in its clutch, and as she stooped to free herself a light flashed directly to her from the opposite shore across the angle of the narrow bay.

François had lit the swinging lantern in the corner turret of the villa, and its familiar beams signalled her away from the treachery of the waves,—calling her home.

At the same instant the crescent moon dropped beneath the flood.

CHAPTER XIII

AN EMPTY PLAY HOUSE

THE opera was Manon that night, and the sigh of the waltz love-motive floated over the audience bearing hints of vague desire and sad awakenings. The house was crowded with a brilliant company. The Prince of Monaco was in the royal box, and with him under the great gilt crown, sat a royal guest, a visiting monarch, who, to tell the truth, may have found the entertainment rather too tame for his more vitiated taste in matters of amusement.

Henri de Gaston had been searching everywhere, but in vain, for Vera. His glass swept the house, roamed over the upturned faces, penetrated the recesses of the boxes, but she was not there. She had said she would come. He noted the Americans well to the front, Wrenski in attendance upon Mary Ingram, and farther back Lady Kintore with another Englishwoman whom he did not recognise. He could not locate von Wreden either, and wondered if Vera might not be playing duos with him at the villa, forgetful of her previous intention.

Manon was as old to him as the type her story represented. Vera was always new. He left his place impatiently, only stopping on his way out to greet Mary

Ingram, whose high-bred face made an odd contrast, set in the bouquet of human orchids that surrounded her.

"You are not going?" she asked him reproachfully. "The music is so lovely, so wistful. How can you? Have you heard it before?"

Henri's face did not brighten. "All operas are alike to the deaf, as the deaf prince says. It is toujours l'amour. Tristan, Louise, Manon, what difference? It all means nothing, if the music does not speak to one's heart. It has marvellous things to say to you, sans doute, Mademoiselle,—but to me, it speaks ever with a sad tongue."

Mary watched him as he made his graceful exit; his expressive face now lit by a smile in response to some gracious greeting, now moodily relaxed. She had always felt he was acting; his gaiety had never rung true; but until to-night she had never heard him speak so wearily. It made an impression upon her, for she, too, in her girl-ish way, had been acting of late. She was ignorant of her lines, it was true, and her cues were difficult, her feminine instinct for self-defence the only prompter; but she felt it was acting none the less. Learning her first great lesson in concealment, she was enrolled, secretly, in life's universal school of drama.

She had intentionally avoided meeting Colonel Lyndon-Carr since the day at the golf club. Though she had no faith in palmistry the revelation of her hand had startled her; whether because it proclaimed the imminent danger of her relations with the Englishman, or the nearness of her connection with another, she did not care to

determine. Everything had till now been drifting along so happily that she had ceased to anticipate, like a careless voyager, the harbour for which her ship was originally listed; but now she must be on the watch.

Provided Colonel Lyndon-Carr were in earnest, was he to supplant in a few weeks the faithful lover who was not upon the scene to hold his own? If he were not in earnest, was not his trifling with other women incompatible with the character that a girl must imagine her lover to possess? Her head answered clearly enough, though her heart refused to sentence the offender. Her father's intuition of her youth and inexperience shamed her now. What a catastrophe he had prevented,—no, not that either, for she was bound by her own wish and word—bound as much as ever. If only the music would not sound so wistful! It tinged all her reflections to-night and unduly influenced her.

Would the old ways ever fascinate her again? If she could choose, what face would she wish beside her to-night sharing that waltz strain that ever and again groped its way outward and beyond? She would not admit her weakness even to herself. She condemned her fancy for imagining so trivial a test. This world here and to-night was not her world. This would pass, and her equilibrium restore itself. She turned and talked simply to Wrenski, who, silent as usual, was perfect in his deference and implied adoration.

Wrenski considered it a shame that American civilisation permitted the open exposure of such as she upon the rialtos of the Riviera; but he kept his opinions to

himself, and only hovered with greater persistency in her vicinity. Arthur called him "the ghost of Hamlet's father"; relying on his judgment in many a social quandary and finding his tact unfailing as his discretion. Wrenski did not care to marry. Music was his supreme emotion; which, however, did not prevent the chivalry of his nature from responding to the appeal in the unprotected innocence of the young girl and even of her guardians.

With one last tour to reassure himself that he was not deceived as to Vera's absence, Henri de Gaston left the casino. Arriving at the villa he was admitted, in the momentary absence of François, by a young lackey who in his ignorance declared "M'sieur le Comte to be en.fu-moir," conducting de Gaston thither and throwing open the door. Henri, entering in the expectation of finding Paul, met only a vacant room. Evidently the servant was new or did not know his business.

As he hesitated whether to ring for the delinquent lackey to return and show him out, the notes of the piano wandered across the hall from the music room. They were chords only, creeping in and in. Vera was there then; probably von Wreden also, dining en famille and afterward making the music that had seemed more pleasing to them than the opera. Again he hesitated, and then, the fate of the hesitant was his.

He pushed aside the soft green hangings, and, pausing as they fell behind him, beheld not the genial countenance of the German bending over his cello, but the bowed shoulders of a woman with her hands resting on

the music rack above her, and head bent heavily upon them. Even as the abandon of the posture smote him, instantly her figure recalled the Danaïdes of Rodin;—so lovely, so overthrown. The slight shoulders and white neck were prostrated before him as if by a paroxysm of grief; and how the marble suffered by contrast with the living flesh!

He had never been alone with Vera before. When Paul was from home the villa gates had been closed save to a few women friends. With von Wreden he had often played with her when the older man's presence provided the necessary third, and satisfied *les convenances*. He was perfectly convinced now that his only honourable rôle was instant retreat. She should never know, and could not suspect this intrusion on the moment of her self-betrayal. He could not trust himself to stay. Vera alone, miserable—but certainly he must drop the curtain between them.

He made a step backward, without a hint of noise, and next moment all the uncontrolled impulses of his ill-regulated temperament swept over him. Fierce jealousy of Paul had held him too long in leash. Now, with an oppression upon his breast that choked him, the thought arose, she suffers. Then came the Frenchman's only solution of a woman's tears—she loves, she does not love, or she is not loved! If Paul was losing her, at last his own hour, his, might be about to strike. Again his respect for her impelled him to go. He raised the curtain to obey his soul's best wisdom just as she lifted her head and met his gaze. Her eyes were dry and full of pain.

He advanced swiftly toward her.

"You were not at the opera," he murmured, in extenuation of his presence there, without the farce of formal greeting.

"And you, why are you not there?" She seemed not to notice the unusual in his appearing before her now; possibly she believed the baron in his wake.

"Precisely because I am here," he made answer, with an attempt at lightness.

"But why are you here?" she repeated gravely, her glance seeking the door as if for the confirmation of his companion.

"Because I was there and did not find you, and von Wreden was naturally anxious, knowing your love for Manon."

He must finesse; he had no courage to tell her the truth. She rose and stood with one hand fumbling idly in the music at her side.

"I did not feel like hearing Manon to-night," she said.

"You did not feel like hearing Manon,—you? *Et tu jous si triste!*" he cried.

"I could not bear it—to-night," she interposed. He thought she spoke as he had once heard Mounet Sullet do, through set teeth, as if in suffering. He lost his sagacity at that, and his self-control, crying out:

"Vera, you suffer! You are in pain, unhappy!" He was close beside her now. "Vera, you are disillusioned. I, too, alas, am weary, involved, wretched. You comprehend me?"

Yes, she understood only too well; why should she not? His story was too palpable to have escaped her sense. At the mercy of that national excitability that makes the existing moment seem all, he rapidly continued: "My soul is always your slave. You are aware of it. How to console you? At least, it is sweet to confide our griefs to each other! If sleeplessness and fever have made me dream of an eternal repose, in which our common misery should unite us,—is it treachery? Broken-hearted, inexorably chained, if there but remain to us the sob and the sigh as passion's heritage, whom do they wrong?"

To the good woman sin comes always as a surprise. She may be worsted by its very unexpectedness and her own unpreparedness, but more often the unwonted strangeness keeps her clear. It is here her more sophisticated sister has a perpetual advantage. Alice Johnston, wholly untried in evil, dallied with the first importuning of passion, while Vera, to whom suggestions of infidelity were less unfamiliar, had dismissed them without reflection. She had aroused too much transient French emotion to be shocked as another woman might have been by this present avowal. At the same time she gauged Henri de Gaston by his own career, counting as exceptional, and crediting him for, the unhappy liaison with a poor and respectable girl whom he had ruined but never wholly deserted. She was not deceived by this outbreak of his inflammable nature now. It was only that in her present un-nerved condition she preferred to consider him objectively; perhaps even this unasked assurance of

her power gave her a momentary satisfaction in the midst of her lonely misery.

"Vera!" he entreated again, huskily, since she had not repelled him.

"Ah no, my friend, I do not care to lose you just yet from my life," she replied at last, cynically; "or to endanger our spirit music, the flight of our flügeln des Gesanges."

"Me to lose?" he cried excitedly. "It is never me to lose that I am so mad as to propose such infantilism to-night to you who are indeed the Lotus' sister! It is to satisfy a hunger at present denied; to teach you what love, asking nothing in return, can be."

She detected the slur against Paul, and met it with her faint shrug.

"It would not be worth the price," she said indifferently. "It would avail nothing." Her hands began to wander over the keys aimlessly.

"Worth the price?—O mille, mille fois!" Her calm intoxicated him more than all the hysterics of other women he had loved. To be treated by her as a child infuriated him so that it seemed to him all he was born for, all he had lived for, was to wrest her, consenting or unconsenting, from Paul de Hauteville, for himself.

"You think so for the moment, perhaps, but afterward is too long; I do not trust it," she said.

Instantly his eyes were covetous.

"For eternity; such an afterward would be too short!" he cried passionately, but there was a spas-

modic catch in his throat that impressed her, even then, as too artistic to be true.

"I do not count upon eternity, cher ami," she said. "It may or may not enter into one's calculation of success, if I were fool enough in a fit of momentary insanity to yield to an impulse of the blood. But it is only Paul who can kill me or give me life. I am sensible of both power and attraction. I have felt a certain joy in the exercise of both over you, with Paul near me; but never for an instant with you alone."

"Paul, always Paul! He does not love you!" mocked Henri. "He loves himself. He is even now——" Vera's hand wandered on, further into the haunting air from Manon. Her eyes were lit with something that should have warned him to beware.

"Paul is my master," she said. "I should rise to follow him if death itself held me. If I had been married when I first met him, I should have gone to him just the same. He is my law of life. It is fate. You, Henri, are cursed by your inheritance. You cannot judge of me. You are not strong enough to be consistently and enthusiastically bad, and you love the things of evil too well to be wholly good. Paul would say fate had gone into every phase of your ancestry and temperament."

He listened awe-struck. He had never supposed her capable of such insight.

"Then it is not religion or fear that holds you to him?" he stammered.

"No. Something far greater. My power of loving; that which is stronger than all else beside in me."

"Car l'amour est plus fort que la vie ou la mort," he whispered bitterly

She bowed her head in assent, speaking low and rapidly. "Having love, one has all. Without love, one has nothing. It may give more pain than joy, but joy without it is less than pain. Were Paul to cease loving me, he would still be Love, in my life. No other dream could ever efface him, or what he has been to me."

"Seul être fidèle," he whispered, his lips trembling.

She had never spoken in this fashion to any one; it did not seem to him to be Vera who was speaking, but the spirit of woman.

"Love does not go where it is due, mon ami; it goes often where it does not belong and is not valued. Love is a cuckoo, laying its precious eggs in the nest of alien birds where it is not wanted! I have thought so often of the poem the Englishwoman said for us: 'An invisible thing, a voice, a mystery,'—whose nest is never to be found. And the sure repose of the wandering restless heart, where can one find it? We too, like all the rest, seek it still. It has become for us all, 'A hope, a love, still longed for, never seen.'"

He would have interrupted, but she gave him no strength to oppose her cruel truth.

"This foolish American, my almost brother, has every reason to worship his wife, but it is poor Vera who upsets his being—Vera, who cares nothing, who trembles at the very step of a man whose nest was filled first by a wilder bird than any she had dreamed of."

He paled perceptibly. "Or why not say, poor Henri, whose love is due in one miserable quarter, but soars despite its leaden wing to a nest high among the trees in your dream forest?" His spirit drooped visibly; the bitterness of it all was on his soul.

"Love is the one free mystery," Vera went on dispassionately, disregarding his plea. "Lightning is scientifically controlled, made to work and obey,—but love.—*Mon Dieu!* who can oppose it or appoint its course? We may not be as savage as love ourselves; we may control our desires, but Love can not be bound. We are its slaves. We may die with striving against it, but it will not let us go. It is stronger than we, and inexorably cruel. It is a tyrant, a despot. It enlists the thoughtless senses against us; subordinates the will and the mind; makes us suffering brutes when we would be victorious spirits. O Henri, Henri, pity the race! Pray for it!"

The man drew back before this vision of a woman's burden, unmanned before her pain. Tears dropped from his eyes. He longed to have her lay her head upon his shoulder and let him comfort her. She was the only woman he knew, whom, under like circumstances, he would not have dared to soothe and kiss like an unhappy child. He would have died to give her some semblance or shadow of happiness.

As she leaned again over the piano, hiding her face in her hands, the incomparable lines of de Musset's *Lucie* swept over him like a breath over harp strings, and left him quivering:

"Elle penchait la tête, et sur son clavecin
Laissait, tout en rêvant, flotter sa blanche main—
Fille de la douleur,—Harmonie, Harmonie!"

All the lyric element in his nature returned to him. Lost in love's abstraction she was as far from his attainment as the pale Lucie in the *élégie*, or the silent Comtesse de Hauteville he had known in the past. Love was her vocation. He understood it now. She was a nun of one man's order, veiled in her own passion. Mere mortal satisfaction held no lure for her. And the more perfectly he comprehended, the more completely the comprehension maddened him.

"You who are so cold," he said at last, "you who give nothing of yourself, why do you persist in impersonating the goddess of the barren waves? Why do you stir in the hearts of men that which you will never grant nor comprehend?"

Lifting her sad eyes to him, her hand still groping through those regretful chords, she replied:

"Because there is nothing else. Music is trying to say it. Art is breaking its heart to express it. You know yourself if you have it, you have all; if you have it not, you have nothing. Love is and will be supreme while there is yet a life to spoil or a heart to break."

"Ah, oui, c'est tout; c'est vrai," he assented. His chin dropped on his breast as if he held his violin in his arms once more, as he sighed, "To comprehend such feeling for an idol, for a hero, for a god,—it is possible. But for a man, a mortal, even as myself,—No! It passes

comprehension. Forgive my profanation,—if you cannot pardon; forget——”

“It is fortunate for us,” she said gently, “that man’s best usually comes to him through the worst of a woman, and en revanche. That is why a man’s inspiration often comes from one woman and is offered to another——”

Was she exonerating Paul in her own mind?

“That is why Nature baits her trap with the mystery of fascination,” he said; “fascination that depends not on the man or the woman, but the two together, like the stars. As you are enchantment to me;—Vera!”—again his hands went out to her—“how are you to love, now that you know all? How are you to live without his love? Tell me! Let me——” He opened his arms as if in shelter.

What he was about to say was cut short by the sound of footsteps, as François crossed the hall and entered the room with unseeing eyes, a deportment of strictest servility.

“Pardon, Madame la Comtesse,” he said. “One telephones for Monsieur le Comte. I have replied he is not en ville. One demands to speak with Madame la Comtesse. If madame wishes to command me?”

Vera rose.

“Baron von Wreden is doubtless detained. It will be necessary to postpone our rehearsal until another time,” she said to de Gaston distinctly, in French, that François might fully catch the import of every word. “Make my regrets to Madame Johnston. I cannot join the party at supper, as M. de Hauteville is not at home. Bon soir.

Au revoir. Make my compliments to all, and accept my thousand excuses for leaving you to go to the telephone."

Henri bowed without lifting his eyes, and left the room followed by the impervious butler, who held his coat for him and presented his stick and gloves as punctiliously as if the honour of his master's house lay in his hands—as possibly he may have thought it did.

When Vera reached the telephone it was only to be informed that the "fil" was "coupé"; nor could the central office ascertain who had wished to speak to her.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTIC WHEEL

THE night wore slowly by. Vera waked from brief dreams of evil to stare about the dimly lighted room and long for day. All her jealousy and distrust and nameless fear were swallowed up in her anxiety to see Paul once more; to touch his coat, to know this whole thing a sickening hallucination. His mere presence would bring assurance; he would dispel the gathering horrors. That woman had lied,—money was easily enough obtainable for them; their exchequer could not be empty while they lived as they did. The light made horrid shadows on the wall; she got up and turned it off, then lay in darkness, a prey to her own wakeful fancies.

She wondered where Paul was now, why he had made no effort to reach her by telephone at least; whether he could have yielded to the woman's repeated entreaties and sold his soul to her in bondage. Even if his play had been as high as it had been unlucky, was it likely that he could not meet his debts of honour unassisted? That Hélène Prévaille might be a resource for him if other hope had failed, she did not doubt; but would she be a resource in advance of dire extremity? She could not believe it of Paul.

Day found her worn and weary. All the morning she waited vainly; no message came. The telephone startled her to her feet from time to time, but François, answering, never summoned her. She sat by the wide window looking out over the sea, remembering, making no pretence of any other occupation. The bell rang, echoed, and all was again still. François had denied her to some one probably; she cared too little to enquire. It was not her custom to be disturbed in the morning.

Lost in her own imaginings she heard again in fancy the voices that were wont to rise from midnight suppers in the villa; saw the light feet, satin shod, ascending the garden stairs afterward; saw again in fancy the careless arm supporting a fair guest, half in play, half in tenderness. The old, heedless joy of those merry midnights came back to her now, flouting her like unlaid ghosts, all because Paul was away, and gone without adieu.

When afternoon came and still no relief from the strain of expectation, she determined to end at last her foolish dejection. Dressing for the street she left the villa, accompanied only by a footman, with the idea of amusing herself a little in the public gardens; the sunshine and bands there would soon dispel her morbid depression, she hoped.

She did not admit to herself that she was listening for the train from Genoa. It would be Paul's train if he had been attending to the business interests that often called him thither. She did listen, however, so intently that she heard at last the little shriek of the locomotive above all

the blare of the band, and watched the black stream of figures issuing from the station below the gardens, hardly breathing. This was the train from which she had hoped everything—and it had not brought him. The day was not to know his voice, the vivid throb of his approach. God! if he never came?

She felt ill, faint. She had waited before at midnight, at dawn, at noon, but Paul had always come at last, and she had forgotten all except the radiant moment of his coming. He had always said his adieux, too, before. No, no, he would come. It was a nightmare. She was dreaming only; she would awake soon and see the shadows on the wall thrown by the night light, and laugh at this phantom train that had derided her hope.

Getting up and beginning to walk about a little, she met Arthur, who had detached himself from a party of pleasure seekers that sat not far away, enjoying the charm of the perfect afternoon.

“Well, how do you go?” he cried gaily, imitating the French salutation; but her drawn face sobered him at a glance.

“I have a headache,” she confessed, noticing his change of expression; “I thought the air and a little exercise would do me good.”

“Has your husband returned?” he asked, trying to be casual. She replied briefly that she did not look for Paul before night.

“Oh, well, there is nothing to worry about. You are wise to come out; husbands, like chickens and curses, come home to roost. He will be all right. Duelling

seems like the dark ages to me, but I suppose it clears the air sometimes——”

He stopped abruptly, seeing Vera's face. She had caught that one word duelling.

“Why do you speak of duelling?” she demanded.

Arthur looked at her, and then quickly off to the sea. “I tried to find you last night,” he said, “and again this morning several times. I telephoned too, but your old President of the Sorbonne, François, would not let you be disturbed. Alice thought you ought to know in spite of Paul's wishes, that he had accepted a challenge from Prince Nicolieff. They met at dawn to-day by arrangement of their seconds.”

There was a garden seat near by, completely enveloped in ivy; Vera dropped into it limply.

“You are joking; it is an instance of your American humour,” she insisted.

“I only wish it were,” said Arthur. “Didn't you see Paul yesterday? He left the ‘Cercle’ to find you and say good-bye. He had barely time to catch his train. He had affairs to put in order.”

“With whom did you say he fought?” she asked incredulously. “I make no sense of what you are telling me.”

“With Prince Nicolieff.”

“It is nonsense! They have been so closely associated—for years.” Her mind ran rapidly back; no possible ground of quarrel presented itself to her memory.

“If you really mean you did not see your husband yes-

terday, let me assure you, Truth, that I am in deadly earnest. Count de Hauteville left the 'Cercle,' having chosen his seconds, to say good-bye to you."

Arthur's voice was excited and a bit defiant now; her doubt of him and her corresponding faith in Paul exasperated him.

"What happened? Tell me the whole——" The flunkey who carried her book and parasol was absorbed in the manoeuvres of the royal yacht just coming to anchor in the basin below. Arthur stood before her, so that no one passing by might observe and comment upon her white face as he spoke:

"The rooms were full of card players; most of them men to whom Paul had presented me on the occasions when he has been kind enough to take me there. The prince disputed your husband's right to a seat at the baccarat table, where the play was running very high——"

"Was Paul losing or winning?" Vera interrupted intently: it meant everything to her.

"I don't know; I never play myself, and I was just strolling about, looking on. It was baccarat they were playing; that's all I know——"

"Go on," said Vera.

"Paul took the situation handsomely; gave up his seat with civility. The prince was quarrelsome; it was plain to every one he had been drinking. It was all very hushed and sudden,—a mere question of precedence at the card table. Your husband relinquished his seat at once in favour of his friend; when the prince remarked in an

audible voice that he could not accept a favour from a man who was not a gentleman."

"And then?"

"De Hauteville knocked him down. A challenge ensued instanter; duel to be fought near Paris. The sentiment was entirely with your husband," Arthur added consolingly.

"Paul says there are always three things in every unlucky sequence; if one disaster comes, two more must follow," was Vera's comment. "I have had mine, now the luck must be about to turn." With actual danger her courage rose again. She could face facts, though she fled from phantoms.

"Can I do anything? Serve you in any way? Help you——" he begged awkwardly, aware of having blundered in his story.

"How?" she said, matching his question with her own.

"What are you going to do? Where are you going?"

"I shall go home; there may be some message for me."

"If I can serve you, Truth, now or ever"—he struggled with the intensity of his longing to count for something with her, even in the shadow of her great unhappiness.

"Don't you want me to go to Paris?" he added helplessly.

"No. Not yet."

"But later? If you need any one who belongs to you——"

"If I should need any one who belonged to me I have

no one but Paul," she answered in her colourless voice, that hurt him by its finality.

"But if you need anything at all, always call on me, always depend on me, will you, Truth? At all times, in any way?"

"Thank you, Arthur; it is good of you to offer. I shall not need any one," she repeated. "If you will just be good enough to send my servant here!"

Arthur summoned the young flunkey, who was new in the service of the villa, and had a vaguely familiar scar on his left cheek. Arthur thought he recalled the man as footman of the motor whose charming occupant had given him a note for Vera at the *prix de Rome*. He was still speculating as Vera walked away, mechanically accepting the parasol the man opened for her, and bidding him throw his light wrap across her shoulders.

The process of getting home again and to her window overhanging the sea was all a blank in Vera's mind. She only remembered wishing that the sun would cease its automatic shining,—the meaningless, theatrical sun.

Paul, openly despised by a man who was not, but who held him as, his equal; Paul desperate for money; Paul with the woman *Préville's* money staked in play; Paul wounded, dead perhaps—haunted her, challenged her. The words the actress had cried out rang in her ears: "Do not refuse me to aid him! He has the line of violent death in his palm."

She went to his dressing-room, to steady herself by some mute evidences of his familiar presence. Over his desk, where his most sacred personal effects were treas-

ured, hung an old engraving of the Delphic Sibyl, the startled prophetess with eyes too young for her vision, direct daughter of the Cumean, most famous of the sibylline cult throughout the pagan world. The strength in this prophetess of Michelangelo's seemed to impart inspiration to Vera now. She had often heard Paul laud this conception. "Socrates believed the Delphic Sibyl haunted by the voice of God," he used to say. Paul's occultism had never troubled her; it was a part of him,—part of his mystery of personality that had never been wholly obliterated by intimacy, and yet his lesser personal belongings, though they touched her to tears, did not put him before her like this reminder of his spiritual self. She knew that his mystic books lay in a cabinet apart, and noted oddly that, contrary to all precedent, his wheel of Pythagoras had been left upon his desk. Had he then been consulting it hastily, in dread of going to his duel unwarned by the Fates? If so, had his nerves been steadied by hope or weakened by evil portents? She knew too well that he would make no effort to resist in either case, self-declared fatalist as he was.

What if she were to venture an appeal to Pythagoras herself? She knew how the problems of the wheel were worked. The idea became an obsession to her. Unbelieving, yet timid, she caught up a pencil, and closing her eyes chose her number at random from the face of the wheel. The device, as every one interested in astrology is aware, is based on mathematical calculations and the influence of the stars, which the questioners of old consulted in rapt and awestruck mood.

Vera made her calculation rapidly, with just enough faith to mitigate her own anxiety and scorn.

To her number, chosen blindfold to give chance a friendly opportunity, she added the number which astrology allotted to the first letter of her name, the number of the month and the day; then, making the arbitrary division by thirty, as instructed, she awaited the remainder, which was to decide her question: Was Paul safe?

If it fell in the table of figures on the upper portion of the wheel, the answer was favourable; if in the lower? Again she assured herself she did not place the least confidence in the augury, yet trembling pitifully, she sought her number on the face of the wheel. It lay well to the top. Paul was safe.

But it was only a surcease: the conflicting beasts of conjecture and incredulity were soon upon her again. Her thoughts reverted to the girl who had hurled her life away in the hour in which her love was done. She had a fascinated admiration for such courage, lacking in herself.

The darkness was coming on again,—the blessed darkness when no one could pry or observe. She had loved it as a child; now it brought covert for her broken heart.

Half consciously she found herself repeating, as she sought her own room:

“What of the darkness! Is it very fair?
Are there great calms and find ye silence there?”

“Is it a bosom where tired heads may lie?
Is it a mouth to kiss our weeping dry?”

"Is it a hand to still the pulses' leap?
Is it a voice that holds the runes of sleep?"

Presently her maid entered quietly, and flooded the room with light. "What robe would madame wish?" she asked.

Vera gave her orders, submitted to the routine of toilette patiently, and went through her ceremonious dinner alone. François crept deprecatingly about, as if wishing that his feet were wings, the less to obtrude upon her respectful hush. Through it all he offered her course after course worthy the consideration of the deaf prince.

When he drew back her chair for her at last, he asked, without lifting his eyes:

"Monsieur le Comte will have dined?"

"Naturally,—yes. I think so, after this hour," she replied. "You may prepare his game and wine and leave them as always, should he wish his supper later."

François' bowed head inclined still lower.

"I am not receiving to-night, not even the baron. Bonne nuit, François," she added kindly.

She walked slowly from the room, across the hall and up the stairway, her tall figure, with its fine lines and gracious curves, well in the view of François until the second landing. The flush of gratification died from his face as she disappeared, and the old eyes filled. He had received that order for the late supper so many times since his service in the household, but never before to-night with such a strange sense of things being amiss. Madame had always been kind to him, showing him a condescension that a Frenchwoman in her posi-

tion would never have thought of. He was no longer young; but his loyal heart was touched by the proud misery of her face. He pondered these things sadly as he put away his liqueurs, and prepared the bird and salad for the midnight "répas" of the Master.

It was late when Vera, having dismissed her maid for the night, stood in a white lace peignoir, again spell-bound before the Sibyl in Paul's room, in whose expression now there seemed to linger something sinister, bodeful of evil. One other question she burned to ask of the reassuring wheel. If it answered that favourably, she felt she could sleep, letting Fate take care of her. Alas for the woman whose God is supplanted by an imperious human love! To her scepticism as to how the calculations of a Greek philosopher, nearly six hundred years before Christ, could concern themselves with her petty enigmas, she opposed a sentence which Paul most frequently quoted from Tycho Brahe: "To deny the influence of the stars is to deny the wisdom and providence of God."

She dallied, not daring to risk so momentous a certainty, but after repeated indecisions yielded finally to her curiosity; made her mathematical calculations as before, hurriedly as if afraid of being surprised; and looked for her number among the fortunate ones in the upper half of the diagram—in vain.

The question she had asked was: "Has he been true to me?"

Stealing the secrets of destiny she stood guiltily transfixed, recalling with a futile pang that Paul had always

refused to question the wheel twice upon the same day. Her temerity now deserved the blow from which she recoiled, even while she protested contempt for the fatuity of it all, and was sick with the pain of it.

The great gilt clock below chimed one. Life was beginning now at the cafés; the "Cercle" would be full. Here in Paul's room, it was very solitary. While a man might seek distraction from these imperturbable hours, she, as a woman, could only wait.

The sea grew noisy outside, troubled by the rising wind. The surf broke higher than she ever remembered to have heard it; or perhaps it had never roared against such utter silence. Great waves threw the pebbles on the tiny strip of beach below the garden and then noisily raked them back into the flood; tormenting them through the night as fate sported with her and her poor hopes.

If Paul had fought and fallen, why did not some one in mercy send her tidings? Arthur's surmise about Paris must have been wrong: duels were fought nearer to the gaming rooms than Paris. But granted Paris was the rendezvous, if Paul were unharmed, he should have been here at midnight. The pitiless wheel had bound her as cruelly as ever Saint Catherine was bound to her martyrdom, and without the consolation of the Saint.

If Paul were untrue would he come back to her? Did she want him still to come? She throttled any scruples of conscience unheard. She must efface her suffering a little while, at least. She must sleep; to-morrow she would face the inevitable. As yet the darkness still enfolded and protected her. She drank a glass of some

old Spanish sherry that François had thoughtfully placed within her reach, earlier in the evening; and threw herself upon the chaise longue, deathly weary of her struggle for calm. Youth and health soon asserted themselves, and she presently fell into a light, dreamless sleep.

She knew not how long it was before she waked with a start, sure that some one had touched her, and opened her eyes wide upon Paul, kneeling before her and covering her cold hands with his warm kisses.

“Darling, darling!” he cried, “what a terror you have given me! I saw an empty glass, and you seemed in such a sleep of death.”

He snatched her to him, and the grace of all past delight overwhelmed them. It was no faded echo of a dead desire, this long embrace; on her part like a swoon. It was not sin—it was worship on his part; unless sin and ecstasy bear one name. In his arms she could not reason. He might be unworthy of her, yet to her he was Love itself. At last he begged, scarcely taking his lips from hers:

“Can you forgive these hours?” And she, drawing back her face the better to lose her eyes in his, cried brokenly:

“More! I bless you for giving me full knowledge of my love. I have sounded the depths. I ask only of eternity, or whatever awaits us in a freer space, to continue this moment forever!”

In the sweet silence neither heard the clamour of the unassuaged sea washing the pebbles from that nar-

row beach below, less loud than the beating of their hearts.

Her solicitude for him brought Vera her control at last.

"You are pale, weary,—you have eaten nothing, I am sure. Come," she urged, "our little feast is waiting as always."

He submitted to be led to the dining-room, where his répas was indeed daintily spread. He had no appetite, but Vera, sitting on the arm of his high-backed chair, held his glass and tyrannised over his reluctance. Suddenly she leant over him caressingly:

"Was it a question of money, Paul?" she whispered. He shook his head negatively. "Then it is not true; we are not ruined. You do not fear for our future! No threat of unhappiness is hanging over you?"

Paul touched his lips to the glass she offered: "There are two tyrants in history, Vera and Napoleon," he said gravely.

"You are not anxious?" she persisted.

"For the present, no. The future, 'qui connaît?'" He shrugged his indifference.

"Money is the least of life," she conceded; "we will turn gipsies in the spring weather, and roam over Italy together."

"The desert would be my dream," he said meditatively, as if already far away in thought; "the desert, where we could see the gold stars come out on the pink sky. Only the Arabs in our world; a tent to cover our weariness;—a solitude à deux."

"And I would be your chef de caravan!" she cried. "Do you think Loti and Hichens would lend us a corner of their desert for our wanderings, if we promised to keep out of their novels?"

Little by little, in badinage and earnest, she drew from him the bare outline of the duel. They had fired three times, he admitted, but neither was hurt. They had parted without shaking hands.

"Let me forget it to-night!" he pleaded wearily. "Let me forget everything but you!" He drew her clinging lace drapery close about her lithe figure, slim and straight as a boy. "Quelle lignes!" he exclaimed, imitating with her clinging lace the lines of imaginary sculpture, delighting in her charm of subtle curve and delicate limb. "I must have a marble made of you. Spirit of flame!—the world has never dreamed of such beauty. Ah, comme je t'aime!" he murmured. He shut his eyes and laid his head upon her breast with a sigh of content.

When their desultory speech was resumed again, it was by Vera's playful question: "Do you believe that a man never marries his first love? Henri de Gaston says so."

"Chere bien-aimée, I do not find it matters to me what other men do."

She blew an imaginary kiss into the air for his indifference, saying, "And I too would rather be my lover's first life and last love. But Henri de Gaston says——"

"That he finds there is a law against bigamy even in 'la belle France?' Yes? Hélas! A man's first love

can therefore never be his wife save by exception or divorce. Probably my dear Henri has observed Madame Alice not to be the first love also of your old companion of infancy Monsieur Johnston. America is also perhaps as la belle France?" he insinuated playfully.

Vera sighed.

"Poor Arthur! It must be like living perpetually in the snow light that we had at home, to be her husband!"

"And she is not, as I suspect, his first weakness?"

"She is a devoted wife, but she is too bright. She makes me feel as the sleigh-bells used to do across the snow in the winter afternoons at home;—before I loved you. I am sure she would wear a red negligée if she were ill——"

"No, no Vera. You deceive yourself there. She is never indisposed. She is always full of energy, cheerful, occupied. She has not time to be otherwise. Ah, the poor mari!"

"Time?" echoed Vera vaguely. "Yes, nothing accents time with us here. But there, I suppose those same whistles still blow at morning, noon and night. Here no bells ring; no clocks strike. It is not necessary. Time saunters in a leisurely manner. It is to-day or to-morrow, as it happens; not by calculation. Morning decidedly is not 'at seven,' nor is night from the close of day, or the day done with the going down of the sun. Would you care more for me if I knew the days always of the month, and had not time to be always idle at your call? Perhaps you would find it more piquant if it were sometimes not just Paul-day and You-o'clock? Would you, cher cheri?"

"For the happy time exists not," quoted Paul, in answer. "That is the old viceroy's favourite proverb. I want only to be as in the past, for ever your morning, noon, and night, your sun of winter and your hope of spring. Your heart-beats are my eternities; your inclinations my only responsibility to the hours."

"C'est juste, Paul. We are indeed very wise," she agreed smiling.

Thus by tact and nonsense he diverted her from the subject that preyed upon her heart, and led her by tender questioning to tell of the hours of his absence, of those hours at the Villa des Vagues, and of that waiting moon.

"What a fantastic creature you are, Vera!" with something of a shudder. "Swear to me never to do this thing you hint of—alone"—he insisted, holding her hands across his heart. "Let it be we two together, when you will,—but never alone. Partons dans un baiser pour un monde inconnu——"

His tone was unlike his usual note.

"Would you have been desolate without me?" she asked—"Why will women so linger on a pang?"

"No!" he said.

Her colour flew to her face, for he had meant it; he was serious.

"No?" she repeated.

"No, for I should not live without you. I should not even try! A life without your love,—it would be the inferno. If you died or ceased to care just as you do, to love me precisely as you do now, I should cease to live—tout simplement."

There was something more convincing than protestations in this air of having long since determined once for all his course in such an emergency.

"What do you mean, Paul?"

"I mean that to me you are a spirit, above the level of women who partake of sense and the satisfactions of sense, like men. I have never thought of you as a woman merely. If your spirit abandoned me I should follow it."

"What would you do?"

"When the dream breaks, life is over. If my dream broke I should do as the Greeks did; seek the eternal darkness in which to remember and dream again."

His melancholy increased slightly, but she could not quite believe in his earnestness, until he whispered passionately, as if overcome: "I have only you in all the world. You do not know what you are to me, my paradise, my dream, my life! To live without you I could not! I am incapable."

She could not question or entreat further that night. One misgiving only escaped her before she slept.

"Had your quarrel a woman beneath its pretext, Paul?" And his answer had been the word she dreaded most to hear:

"Yes."

His physical exhaustion alone would have warned her from further inquisition, even if his manner had not plainly indicated his wish that the incident remain closed for ever. Had the mystic wheel told her the truth?

CHAPTER XV.

“THE CONSTANT MAN”

THE white clouds, rolling up over the horizon and its jagged mountain tops, stared at Vera the next morning like floating seraphim.

It was good to have life—life, with all its bitter and sweet, its desolations and perfections; its tears; yes, and even its shame. Yesterday her fancy, with an intoxication of despair, had seen her huddled form upon the waves. To-day in her sudden reaction she hated such a thought; hated even the recollection of its having been a possibility. For the next few weeks, day succeeded day, and still no evil breathed upon her or her love. She kept her silence as to the strange interview with Héléne Prévile. She coveted the truth less than the joy of her own and Paul's restored existence.

The carnival meanwhile had come to an end at Nice, though the marine battle of flowers made gaiety at Villefranche. Mary Ingram was ecstatic over her part in the spring pageant there, as she glided slowly around the pretty harbour. She was one of a party of young English people, in a bark covered with mimosa and violets, and having great stems of plummy lilacs for masts. Her beautiful face, glowing with unconscious enjoyment of the hour, attracted many a world-worn glance. She was besieged continually by flying nose-gays, until, in spite of

her vigorous return fire, she found herself standing almost knee deep in the fragrant missiles of the fight.

The sport of the mimic skirmish immensely interested Colonel Lyndon-Carr, who stood at her elbow, aiming his volleys at the prettiest women and the most successful floats, with a soldier's precision of eye. The ingenuity of the display was surprising. There were boats designed like fish, all in white gilly-flowers; boats representing Cinderella's slipper, with rosettes of pink carnations on a ground of hyacinth blue; gondolas, dragons, baskets of flowers, horns of flowers, giant swans whose wings moved rhythmically with the motion of oars concealed beneath. Around and around the tiny harbour they all floated, waging beauty against beauty in the battle.

Suddenly a great dewy rose fell at Mary's feet, so fresh and wonderful she stooped involuntarily to pick it up. To her surprise Colonel Lyndon-Carr captured it and coolly put it in his button-hole. The next moment, a bunch of *réséda* hitting her hat smartly, she turned to retort in kind and met a gay broadside from a crew of mettlesome strangers, recognising among them as they drifted away her ex-countrywoman, Mrs. Chauncy.

So that was the reason why the rose had been captured! She had less spirit in the remainder of the sport. Of course she had not expected a gentleman to refuse an open signal from a lady, but he need not have been so eager about it; at least not when he was with her. The little incident rankled. Roses had thorns, she was discovering.

She had kept away from the festivities at Nice, but she had heard of Lyndon-Carr as being there, gayest of the gay. With Harlequin and Columbine, Pierrette and Pierrot, at the "redoubte blanche" and on other occasions, both masked and brazen faced, he had mingled. It frightened her, though undeniably it fascinated her as well. She was a girl of quiet force, who deliberated deeply and acted irrevocably. She had invented many excuses for his varying behaviours this winter, but she could not square her conclusions with her preference and desire. Whether she wished him to love her, whether she wished him a different character, or even whether she already cared enough for him to make either question importunate, she had not yet discovered.

The Charity Bazaar later at Monte Carlo, in which they were all involved, was itself a form of carnival in its way. Vera was deeply interested in its success, and had urged Alice to assist at the champagne booth, where the vendors were all culled from the titled and talented of the vicinity.

"It is not necessary to kiss each glass as you offer it, if you do not wish; if it does not please you," Henri de Gaston put in encouragingly, with mischief in his eyes. He admired Madame Johnston, but he believed he knew her limitations.

"Oh, but by all means, if that is the fun of the occasion," cried Mrs. Arthur. She was not scandalised by his challenge, as she knew he expected her to be, and it was his turn to be puzzled.

"Fun?" he asked, "the fun? The Frenchwoman

does not know about it; your fun. She knows solely l'amour."

"Then the sooner she learns fun the better," cried Alice. "It is as real to Arthur and me as belief in a personal devil."

Henri made no attempt to understand. It was at the Casino later, when the lights were blazing in the crystal reflectors, that he really learned the adaptability of the American woman. Among all her brilliant rivals in the booth Alice held her own. The old Viceroy beamed on her, when he heard her bid good-evening to him in Russian (laboriously committed to memory with Wrenski's aid). He drank steadily to her health, only pausing in his charitable efforts to add each time: "One thread from everybody makes a shirt for the poor, as our Russian proverb says." As for Colonel Lyndon-Carr, he came and brought every Englishman of his wide acquaintance to pay their dévoirs and bivouac about her, assuring her she was "looking really swagger, by Jove!" Wrenski hovered silent but supporting, and the deaf prince, remembering vaguely to have sat by her at the table of his honoured friend, the Viceroy, gave a hundred franc note for each glass she dealt him, and refused the change.

The Italian poor were getting richer every hour for the merry efforts in their behalf. Actresses, great and less great, offered lottery tickets, with smiles and pouts intended to reduce the male heart to instant subjection. Prizes of every conceivable degree of attraction were exhibited,—from a resplendent red automobile, to

jewels and costumes gained from the Riviera dealers by the levyings, impossible to be refused, of high society.

"Well, I don't know if I will take a chance or not," said a voice of unmistakably Yankee accent. "I always said I didn't believe in breaking the laws of my country, didn't I, Molly?"

The remark was made to a gauzy creature who proffered the chance for a diamond pendant.

"Why," said Arthur to Mary, "that sounds like the man in Paris who was going to look up the pyramids."

And surely it was, with his acquiescent wife on his arm. He gripped Arthur's outstretched hand with fervour, and in reply to his genial, "Well, how did you find your friends the pyramids?" said gravely, "I found them. I guess that's about all that was necessary."

"What did the sphinx say to you?" persisted Arthur gaily.

"Told me to go back and tell America she knew it all before Broadway was heaved up out of chaos; but that there was no hurry. What have you been doing? Not sitting around this place all winter?"

Arthur deplored their lack of adventure.

"You are too easy-going," said the man of the pyramids, shaking his head dubiously. "Now I always carry out my plans, sick or well, don't I, Molly?"

"Easy-going?" echoed Henri de Gaston, whose quick ear had caught the new Americanism. "And Madame Johnston, she is also 'going-easy,' is she not?" pointing to Alice radiant and quite surrounded.

Vera moved nonchalantly from one exhibition to an-

other in her supervision, quickening a sale now and then by her admiration; taking no active part in lotteries or booths, but lending her presence wherever enthusiasm seemed likely to be on the wane. Countless were the healths pledged her in Alice's crystal cups. Men felt it a distinction to be permitted to raise their glass to her, and paid royally for the slight but gracious inclination they won from her in return. She gave skilfully, not only a recognition of their compliments, but also gratitude for their prodigality toward a worthy object. No one watching her would have guessed her recent sufferings or present preoccupation—the haunting question that never left her, what woman had been responsible for the duel between Paul and the Prince? But the question sounded in her brain continually, and found no answer.

No name occurred to her as offering even a probability. The Prince was a light lover, a gay liver, but not one to descend to a common intrigue. Why had he denied Paul a gentleman's right, and that publicly? What secret did he think he knew that gave him such audacity?

By mutual impulse neither she nor Paul had again alluded to that terrible interruption of their happiness. It stood behind them like a hateful danger passed, a shadow vanished; something fanciful that might grow actual by being recognised. But with it all, even here, to-night, in such a setting, she was artistic, unique. Mary's eyes followed her, enchanted. Her manner was perfect, gentle, but unapproachable. Paul himself was proud of her ascendancy over her European rivals, among whom she

mingled so simply, poised in her own content, unenvious of the most enviable. To-night he admired Alice too, for the first time. She was of the sparkling type, animated, full of verve—what he had heard the Americans call "lively." He could not conceive of being in love with such a woman, but he admitted her gay power none the less.

Lady Kintore, inveighing against all lotteries in general, and audibly put out with all her friends for not participating in her aversion, lifted a disapproving brow upon the brilliant scene.

"Let us walk about a bit, my dear," she urged, grasping Mary's hand and holding it firmly inside her arm. She drew Mary away from a group of young people, who all, including her nephew, resented the intrusion, but Colonel Lyndon-Carr had been indiscreet beyond her forbearance, and she felt she must take measures. He had scarcely attempted to conceal his open devotion, and had irritated his august aunt to the most precipitate action.

"It is very stuffy here; and it's rather nasty, isn't it? All this mixed crowd and indiscriminate selling, or hawking, I should call it. I rather wonder Mrs. Johnston brought you!" she began to Mary.

"She did not bring me," said Mary, "I came myself; but Alice would not think of leaving me out of any fun," she added.

"At least I am glad some one had the sense to keep you from mixing in the crowds. That would have been a little too stiff!"

"Vera wanted me left free to enjoy myself, I suppose," expostulated Mary, but Lady Kintore went on without listening to her:

"Do you know I have been wanting to talk with you for some time, but I declare I never get a chance now-a-days. You are so wrapped up in your new friends. All very young girls are fickle, I fancy,—especially Americans." Her face and tone both were aggrieved.

"Vera has been wonderful to me!" sighed Mary adoringly. "I should never really have seen anything of the society here but for her."

"It is a sad pity she married a foreigner," Lady Kintore resumed flatly; "it is so unfortunate for a girl, particularly if she has no mother."

But if she intended her arrow for the young heart next her, it missed its mark.

"I have seen too little of her lately," regretted Mary.

"That is quite true of us all. You have been too busy with your flirtations to notice us!" She drew her eyelids down over her shrewd eyes, and waited for the remark to take effect. Mary's exclamation was swift to follow.

"My flirtations,—Lady Kintore!"

"You American girls do nothing else, do you?" asseverated Lady Kintore sympathetically. "Now when I was a girl I never saw any men except the officers on parade, or the men at some county ball attended by the aristocracy; and of course I never danced anything but square dances. But I was married at eighteen. I dare say that sounds very foolish to you. Yet an Englishman

would never in the world propose to a girl who knocked about as you Americans do. However much he might amuse himself with her before he settled down," she added significantly.

"American girls do marry later. I think they have a good time first, and then they settle down, as you say the Englishman does. They do it splendidly too!" retorted Mary lustily.

"Do they now? You rather astonish me. We don't see that sort so much over here. They are rather frisky when they get to us. But it is really foolish to marry young." The old voice accented its meaning now. "I never had any fun; really devoted my whole life to the general."

"You must have been very happy," said Mary vaguely. She was politely aware that the evening was going, and that Colonel Lyndon-Carr was looking blankly about for amusement; but she tried to be attentive, in deference to her companion's superior years.

"The Englishman, my dear, cares nothing for the development of a woman's individuality"—by a deft manipulation she steered Mary away again from the enticing vicinity of a certain corner—"he never observes her talents, or cares to help her evolve them. I might have painted, or written very passably; but the general never would hear of my studying. He only laughed when I proposed it once. He left all that sort of thing to the middle classes. I used to play," she added reminiscently, "but I gave it up; he never cared to hear me. We had in a professional to do it often. He preferred it."

"Yes, American men do everything for their wives," assented Mary; "they stay at home and work, and send their wives and daughters all over the world, letting them study everything you can imagine."

"They make the best husbands for their own women, undoubtedly. But if I were a girl again, I doubt if I should marry."

"Oh, wouldn't you?" Mary's naïveté would have been amusing before a different audience.

"Well, perhaps an American husband might develop one," said Lady Kintore; "but Englishmen are very narrow and insular. Their women expect it and put up with it, but I suspect it explains half the miserable international marriages one hears so much about. Especially with the aristocracy. There is such a disparity of birth and custom. The Lord High Chancellor told me that last year there were more than fifty divorces granted from American marriages alone. Divorce is such an American institution, isn't it?"

Lady Kintore was convinced she was employing extreme tact, but she made no effect on Mary's stubborn blindness.

"Oh, but I think love makes everything all right," Mary rejoined. "All the foreign men I have seen have been lovely to me, too. I like them better the more I see of them. I confess I should prefer not to fall in love with a title,—they are so unlucky."

"You certainly can't marry them all!" exclaimed her mentor.

"Oh, no; of course not!" laughed Mary, "and I.

should never think seriously of marrying any one but an American. Except an Englishman, of course."

Lady Kintore tossed her head, and looked well at her. Which was she, this fair child; a child or an accomplished coquette? This time Mary was allowed to pause when they came again to the group from which she had been abstracted with so little result.

Toward the end of the evening, as they all stood at last in the great portico, waiting for their motors, Vera, glancing wearily at the vanishing revellers, noticed Prince Dimitri bowing at the carriage door of the comédienne Hélène Prévile. As he returned into the Casino he came face to face with Paul on the steps, but no least recognition passed between them. In the same instant Vera was aware of the fact that Henri de Gaston's glance was turned full upon her, speculative, convicting; and Arthur Johnston's brown eyes also; in which a look of pain deepened and lingered. Arthur suffered for her, no doubt, in the slight affront he had seen put upon her husband. Henri's glance, on the other hand, lit a suspicion.

If the prince was a friend of Hélène Prévile—her heart sank heavily within her breast. It was all so clear,—the mystery that had hitherto mercifully baffled her.

All this took place in an instant of time. Paul, quite without self-consciousness, it seemed, was full of congratulations upon Alice's success. He stood beside the motor after they were all tucked in and ready to make their start, paying her airy compliments, while Lyndon-Carr waited patiently for his turn to come,

"You won't funk that invitation, will you? You asked me to dine to-morrow night, you know," he reiterated. "It's an awfully important engagement, to me at least," he added, in a tone that no one but Alice could overhear.

"We shall expect you rain or shine. Don't forget it yourself; and don't let any one else get you!" she called back to him as the car began to move.

"Well, rather not!" he shouted, wondering what on earth she could mean.

"The American woman is supreme," commented Paul to him, looking after them and thinking of Vera, as his own car came up.

"They are, by Jove! They really are, now, aren't they?" exclaimed the Colonel.

The next night Colonel Lyndon-Carr dined with the Johnstons, out at their villa on the road to Beaulieu, and although his manner was a bit more jerky than ordinary, he talked astonishingly well both of England and her colonies. He was not especially at home in art, but he knew the names of things decently enough, and where they were to be found if one wanted them; also he evinced his countryman's ability to say nothing about that of which he was ignorant. He was very young for his command; he impressed them as possessing real bravery and skill to have won his colonelcy under thirty, even in these eventful times. On the morals of Monte Carlo he refused to be drawn out.

"I don't go in much for what is underneath the sur-

face. I take life about as it comes, don't you know?" was his attitude.

"I do wish theology would let me alone over here," cried Alice suddenly, with a burst of impatience. "I might as well be a composite Presbyterian council and be done with it! How am I to distinguish good and evil leaves, with catholic and orthodox trees of life bewildering me? And yet I keep trying to do it in spite of myself!"

"As nearly as I can make out," put in Arthur, "one is at liberty to sin all he likes, if only he goes to mass afterward. *The Eclairneur* announces that mass was celebrated at such an hour, and then you read the list of titled rascals who 'assisted.' They may have poisoned their neighbours, or run away with a neighbour's wife the night before; the public function restores confidence in them. Life and morals seem to have no visible connection with each other in a Catholic country."

"It makes the spirit of John Calvin rise up in me," cried Alice.

"The best way is not to think at all; just let their mysteries and lights and colours seduce the ethical and speculative sides of you," said Arthur.

"They are all nothing but so many fascinations, like wonderful toys for the child-side of the soul," she said, shaking her head in disapproval. "I don't want such kindergartens in the solemn affairs of the spirit."

So Alice and Arthur talked on by themselves; but what did the young Englishman, or the girl opposite

him, care, pray, for doctrines or discussion; or for any kind of conversations whatsoever, for that matter?

Lyndon-Carr looked at her dainty brow, with the fair hair growing so soft and low above it; at her firmly cut chin and throat. Her eyes fell before his own; but he knew that they were sweetly, shyly blue underneath those lashes. And she, she only realised that he was there near her; young and manly, and different from the only other man who had ever occupied so much of her meditations. An attraction, primitive, not to be resisted, seemed drawing her steadily toward him.

After dinner the two men strolled out upon the wide stone terrace, smoking as they went. The night was fair, and the flashlight, at steady intervals, shot a gleaming path across the water. Arthur chatted carelessly some moments, when Colonel Lyndon-Carr interrupted him. Laying his hand on his shoulder as if he had been a brother officer, he demanded abruptly:

"I say! You've not got any especial objection to me, have you?"

"Why, no," said Arthur, laughing. "What makes you ask that? Things don't look that way, do they?"

"No, I fancy I shouldn't be here to-night if you had anything against me. Both you and your wife have been uncommon civil to me all along. A stranger, too."

"We like strangers," said Arthur cordially, "that is, sometimes——"

"But that is just the difficulty, you see. I don't want you to like me as a stranger. In fact I want your per-

mission to offer my hand to Miss Ingram. Without your permission, of course, I can't speak to her, and as you are her nominal guardian—well, to say it flat out, I am beastly afraid my aunt will warn her off. She is very opinionated, my aunt, and devilish frank sometimes, and I am afraid I shall break my tether and speak in spite of myself, before you have agreed to it. You see the situation, don't you?"

"Yes. I think I do. You are fairly clear about it. But I am not Miss Ingram's guardian."

"You are not her guardian? Oh, I say, that is peckish! What's a fellow to do now?"

"As you have your aunt in the opposition wing, and don't want to lose the girl, my advice is go in and win!"

The Englishman looked puzzled.

"You don't mean without asking her guardian?"

"I mean ask *her*; ask Mary Ingram herself, American fashion, without reciting the magna charta backward, and stopping to make provision for unborn generations."

"Ah, but that wouldn't be running straight, would it? With a girl like that, anything shady would be the deuce to pay."

"All's fair in your two professions," hinted Arthur.

"Would it be fair, though. Quite sure?"

"Mary would think so."

"Would she understand, eh?"

"She would not understand any other way. She

would probably be very angry to hear you had spoken to any one first."

Arthur was getting interested now. If this was a conspiracy against Tiberius he would instigate revolution as energetically as he knew how. He was ahead of Alice for once, too, thanks to male authority in European institutions. But still, in spite of this rank sedition, the colonel hesitated.

"I ought at least to assure you that my people are all right," he said. "I am not so badly off, either. I'm not making out that I am one of your millionaires, but I shall come in for something handsome later from my uncle, and I am not by way of being a beggar now. I could give a woman all she wanted, I fancy,—independently of my father or my older brother. I should want to satisfy some one on that score before I spoke. It would cut me up to have her say yes, and then find some beastly question of settlements interfering."

Arthur listened to the warm young voice, which set something vibrating in his own breast in quick response.

"You have been strictly honourable and open in this matter, colonel. If you love this little friend of ours,—go ahead! She is unspoiled, and her heart, I believe, is white and empty, save for dreams and prayers, as a maiden's should be. I rejoice you have found each other with the dew on, and I give you my blessing. I only wish it were of more value. She is in the pergola," he added, noting the roving glance of his companion, who, with a swift grip of the hand that made him wince, was off without a word to the pergola.

Down the flight of garden stairs, masses of heliotrope and jasmine and madcap roses mingled their odours in a triple strand with which to ensnare the senses. The pergola lay there, embowered in the creamy Riviera roses, under the silver moonlight, and mounded on either side by wakeful bloom. Below it the rocks descended sharply to the sea, and the sea was very calm, only rustling gently now and again into a deep crevasse lined with dwarf fir trees; a mere luminous splendour down there, without restlessness or sighs. Behind, enmeshed in olive shadows, rose the terraces; farther up on the hillside the mimosa held its fragrance in the salty air. Still higher loomed la Turbie, a wilderness of cliff and crag, very grim in its solitary grandeur. Oranges from a near-by garden added their magic to the hour. There, leaning over the balustrade at the far end of the trellised pathway, the heavy roses lifting their heads to the moon above her, with one daring bunch of Michelmas daisies reaching far out and about her like the scarf of Isolde, luring some sea-gull Tristan, Lyndon-Carr found her.

Gardens and moonlight, night and the sea, poetry outsung, music silenced, beauty as some elusive-winged butterfly caught at last,—the poetry about her, that he never defined to himself as poetry, made him shy. He was not a lyric hero. He divined vaguely that he ought to have been, to justify his being there at that moment, with her. He stopped short, the enchantment of it all arresting his eager feet. The night was one blending chord of fragrance and intoxication. He

dreaded to break the spell of this exquisite last moment, in which he and she should stand thus apart and behold each other unconfessed. He caught his breath and went to her.

The roses above her head were not more sweet than she. His impulse was to stoop and kiss her, then explain. But the lovely serenity of her face held him aloof. He felt it better to go without that caress into eternity than to take it from her ungiven. He had never seen a girl like her.

She had all the indispensable ways of an English girl, and a host of her own beside. She was demure and reverent, yet so full of life and colour,—a soldier's bride!

She looked like a bride in her white gown, with the roses over her head, as he approached more closely, bending his handsome face to hers, and looking deep into her eyes without a word to say for himself. A great rose shivered as he gazed, and let its petals fall one by one over her hair and shoulders, a love-storm of bloom. Would she relinquish herself to him as naturally? She did not seem aware of the caresses of the petals, which lay as they had fallen; but her own heart, perhaps, was to be even as swiftly laid bare under the silvering moon.

"I got permission to come and find you," said Lyndon-Carr, without preamble, when he found himself able to begin. "You must know why I asked it of Mr. Johnston. He said I should find you here——" He was keeping his hands from hers by sheer force of will.

"This is my dream kingdom," she said, smiling up at him. "Could there be anything more beautiful in the world?"

"No," he said solemnly, "and it was created for you;" and he broke abruptly into his happy, hopeful, desperate, wholly sincere and often wholly unintelligible appeal. He was so sure she cared for him, yet he was afraid to show himself sure. But at last, when his hands went out to hers, she drew back gently against the roses, her face quivering with pain.

"Is that my answer?" he begged. "Oh, I say! It is not going to be No, is it?"

Poor Mary! She was victimised by strange sensations never known to her before. Unrecognised desires and young, untried impulses made her lean to him. Hot and cold tremors within her owned him master. Outwardly she was very calm and white, while her soul was smitten with conviction of its perfidy. Her reluctance was all the spur his diffidence needed. At once he was pleading again, speaking as he had never supposed he could. He was conscious of his own voice, ranting like some ass of an actor in a play, yet he could not stop,—not until he read consent to snatch that shrinking, sweet being into his strong arms and hold her against his heart, which no battle had ever set pounding so wildly as her delay. He came nearer. She put out her hand as if to hold him from her.

"Do you really care so much?" she asked wonderingly.

"Care?" he echoed, "do I care? What else have I

been doing, do you suppose, in this rotten hole of a gambling town but care? But care and wait until I hoped you would give me some sign? Once or twice I all but thought you would, but you never did. You disappointed me again and again, you know!"

"You disappointed me once or twice," she said gravely.

"Disappointed you? How?"

"I did not choose to share you with those others."

"I can't think what you mean; my honour on it, I can't."

"Nor whom I mean?"

"Nor whom you mean."

"Mrs. Chauncy," said Mary candidly, but her eyes flashed.

"Well, if that is all!" he began, with a gasp of relief, adding, as if puzzled, "what has she got to do with us?"

"Nothing—with me." She tried to shrug her shoulder as Vera did.

"Oh, you silly! You little baby girl!" cried Lyndon-Carr, victoriously; "jealous of a woman like that! Why, I never thought twice of her, don't you know? Beyond her dancing well, that is, as all the American women do. A fellow likes to dance with any pretty woman well enough, though he may be sweet in quite another quarter."

Mary reflected. He had already caused her a good many pangs in the course of their acquaintance. She recalled her rebuff that first evening at the Casino,

when her bow to him had met with no response. She had heard of him as dancing at other cafés than the Miralton. It frightened her as much as it excited her romantic interest in him. She thought of all this as she said quietly now.

"I suppose a man does like that sort of thing; the sort of amusement you mentioned; but I should not care to have him, if he were mine——"

"Then he won't! Is he yours? Is that all? May I——?"

Again she shrank back a little from him, deeper among the roses.

"No," she whispered, "that is not all; I can't tell you the rest,—but that is not all."

In vain he pleaded for himself; she would not give him his Yes.

"You are not doing the square thing by me," he exclaimed finally; "you'll admit you care a bit, or you would not stay out here with me now. Yet you refuse to explain. It's leaving a chap in the dark so——" he expostulated helplessly.

Then she said it bravely and without extenuation, her eyes like those of a soldier about to be shot for desertion: "I am not free."

If she had said she was blind or insane, or a North American Indian, no greater consternation could have overpowered him.

"Then you were playing with me all along, as my aunt said you were. That's a stiff one."

She shook her head miserably; the tears rose in her

eyes, but she forced them back, though they blinded her and she dared not try to speak.

"I say I don't understand you Americans," he cried with bitterness. "An English girl would have stood off." One great tear dropped over her cheek to her breast,—first the rose, then the tear, as Fate too often has it.

"Accuse me as you will, you cannot be more severe toward me than I am to myself," she declared.

"But there must be some explanation that will set us right. You are not that sort; I deny that out and out on the start!"

"If I excuse, I accuse," she reminded him. "It is my fault, and it is not; I did not mean to be false. I did not know I was forgetting so,—I——"

A sudden illumination came to the lover. "I have it!" he cried happily, "you have forgotten another chap! Or has my aunt been talking to you?"

"A little, yes; that is, no. And you were so sure Americans were 'safe' when they were attached at home. I relied on that a good deal. And I thought you were in love with Mrs. Chauncy, and,—and——" Then he would have kissed her, but again she held him off with her small hands against his breast.

"I won't take no; if I have to order out the reserves and quell you, like a regiment, for insubordination to a commanding officer! I have a great mind to call to Mr. and Mrs. Johnston, and marry you out of hand, and run away with you like the heroes of Gretna Green!"

Thus they made march and countermarch, a long series, across love's disputed country. He could get nothing more definite from her than an appeal for time to think. "Only a month," she had stipulated, "then I shall be sure of myself."

"Long enough to forget that other chap," he promised; "only do be quick about it! If the army had spelled home to you ever since you could remember, you would feel the importance of saving time. A soldier is a bound-to-obey machine, don't you know? My leave may be docked by any mail."

"Lady Kintore would not approve, I am almost sure," protested Mary, smiling faintly, as she recalled their recent conversation.

"You don't suppose I am going to be such a bally idiot as to tell her?" he queried indignantly.

"There is nothing to tell," said Mary. "Perhaps there won't be. I am not sure of anything now."

"You are in siege, remember," was his parting shot. "I shall surround you by fair means or foul at last. You won't be able to hold out against me."

She was very confused and very wretched when he left her. He had gained a temporary advantage, but she felt it was dishonourable on her part to have admitted it. She was bound to consider him as a suitor, while formally the betrothed of another man. It distressed her and disturbed her beyond endurance, yet she found it beyond her strength to put him outside her life. The certainty of his love made him seem now an inevitable part of her life, a life which had always flowed sweetly

and smoothly for her until now; and now there were cross-currents of indecision, contradictory eddies, and arresting obstacles. Physical attractions and repulsions, mightily enhanced, joined their potency to destroy her peace of mind. Conscience charged her with fickleness. Inconstancy exulted over her defection. The compelling, troubling presence of her young Englishman threw the halo of her absent lover into high relief. She dwelt on his serenity to elude the spasmodic tendency of this new and more violent emotion that possessed her, painfully perplexing her simple nature. She rejoiced, and hated herself for regretting, that Lyndon-Carr had not ventured to kiss her. She repeated to herself some lines of Goethe's which her father persistently quoted:

"You blame the woman for roving,—where is the constant man she is seeking to find?"

She knew, alas! where he was to be found;—fond faithful, changeless, unforgetting. No excuse for her there! Unless because he had loved before, loved and wed, he most of all should be lenient with her in her momentary weakness. For was it more than that? Was it not merely something wild and brilliant crashing into her days and nights, that would give way again to peace, like silence after some startling fanfare in the interlude?

It is a crossroad met and turned when a girl comes upon her first scepticism as to the supremacy of first love. Mary had come to that crossroad; and life would never stretch on again through endless sweet meadows,

the straight, impossible-to-be-mistaken highway. Already it had begun to climb and turn and mislead. She had looked once too often into "the bright eyes of danger," and could not look away. The viceroy might have warned her with his Russian proverb: "If you follow two hares, you will get neither."

CHAPTER XVI

WITH THE LOVE OF AMMON

WHATEVER Mary Ingram's emotions may have been following her moonlit interview with Lyndon-Carr in the pergola, they were no more acute than the curiosity of Alice and Arthur Johnston.

"I shall never prognosticate again," mourned Arthur; "I was sure he had captured her, and had only to hold out his hand."

"It seemed so," said Alice, shaking her head slowly; "but that would have been untrue to actual life; too perfect, too ideal."

"She is the kind of girl to throw herself away for conscience's sake," said Arthur. "She has got some imperative scruple about his morals probably. I wish she might have married her first love, though, for I am sure Lyndon-Carr is that," he sighed softly.

"I'm afraid the trouble is with Tiberius," said Alice.

"Then I wish she were in irons!" retorted her husband vigorously.

"She would have made a great law-giver on Sinai," commented Alice. "What would the ten commandments not have turned into? Moses was a sybarite beside her!"

"It is maddening to think how she will exult over the outcome of it all," groaned Arthur.

"And yet, perhaps, it's just as well," sighed Alice. "Mary certainly deserves to be the exception that should prove the ugly rule. Yet I fear she might find quite a field for effort in Lyndon-Carr. He does not seem to me a very stable character, I confess. I can't reconcile myself to his making himself so conspicuous with that Chauncy woman, especially if he were in love with Mary all the time."

"Marriage is quite a house of correction, sometimes," remarked Arthur.

"It is not a Vanity Fair," said Alice.

Arthur nodded. "The colonel is a born philanderer; but he has done nothing under-handed. I like his openness myself; and Mary likes him none the worse for it, I am sure."

"But why need he be either open or shut? Mary can't think the *more* of him on either account."

"She is obliged to think more *about* him, though;—there is nothing so forgetful as certainty."

"He knows that," said Alice with a sly smile; "he does not strike me as a novice with women."

"What if he has known:

'Girls beside the water,
At Janeiro and Gibraltar,
Who can dance right merrily as she?'"

struck in Arthur. "Most men have. Virgin soil is hard to find nowadays. Fortunately, a man's last

love, not his first, is best calculated to make him happy."

"What do you think he will do if she refuses to marry him?" queried Alice, with irrelevance.

Arthur strode to the window and back again to his writing-table, just as he did when determining the crucial point in the career of one of his heroines. "You need not waste any anxiety about that. He won't 'go to his God like a soldier,' this time. He will live to fight another day; that's all."

"Are you discussing the new novel? May I come in?"

It was Mary, fresh from an early saunter, with her doubled hands full of wild flowers; blue hyacinths that matched her eyes. She looked very fair and child-like in her short, white frock, and the great garden hat that sat half askew on her soft hair. As well might spring have waited for permission to enter, or sunlight, or any of Nature's beautiful beneficences.

Arthur answered her.

"We were discussing the relative power of first and last loves. It's about the problem I am handling at this point in my new novel," he explained.

They both welcomed her and summarily dissembled their guilty feeling at having been caught in the very act of prying into her affairs. "Alice and I always agree, so it can hardly be called a discussion. What would you say, Mary? Would you want a man's first love or his last?"

Mary leant over and tied one of the wide bows of

white ribbon on her spotless white shoe. Her face was a trifle flushed when she lifted it.

"I don't believe there is any such thing," she answered, with a decision that surprised them.

"You think one includes the other?"

She stood for a few moments, gazing out of the open window, as if coming to her own conclusions; then, turning toward Alice, answered disconnectedly:

"How would you feel about marrying a widower?"

"A very awkward question, considering Arthur's presence!" cried Alice, laughing.

"Oh, I mean, of course, if you were a girl like me; not yourself; not married."

"Why, that I think it better to be one of a series, than one of several at a time, the way the women are over here! Why do you ask?"

"Because I am engaged to one," remarked Mary simply. "Or rather he is engaged to me; it amounts to the same thing in the end."

By this time her hearers were completely mystified. Arthur recovered himself first, because he did not stop to consider what it might or might not be wise to say.

"Do you mean to tell me Lyndon-Carr is a widower?" he blurted out. "That boy!"

"Why drag in Colonel Lyndon-Carr?" asked Mary, visibly annoyed.

"Because if you are engaged, and engaged to a widower, what else is there to think? Whom else should I drag in—as you put it?"

Alice came to the rescue, laying a gentle hand on Mary's shoulder.

"You must not be vexed with Arthur, dear. Colonel Lyndon-Carr spoke to him last night. He considered that honourable conduct demanded it. We are very happy for you both. We only hope you won't let any little acidity on the part of Lady Kintore affect your decision. He is a noble fellow, and we have been beside ourselves to congratulate you both, but we did not want to seem to force your confidence——"

"Stop!" cried Mary, with a smile flitting like a distracted ghost over her white lips. "You don't understand. I am engaged to a man in America."

While life was thus shaming fiction in the villa on the terrace beyond Monaco, and the novelist, turned pupil, was sitting idly, pen in hand, not daring to risk the truth of such romantic presentations, at the other villa, above the sea, Vera was struggling with her financial resources to assist Paul. She did not wish a hint of her intention to escape from her; but she craved, more than she had ever in her life craved anything before, the satisfaction of paying back Hélène Prévile. The longer she thought the deeper grew her conviction that Paul must have borrowed again; that he had been forced into some new obligation, through misrepresentation, perhaps, or the exigence of some momentary crisis.

Vera had no fortune of her own. Theirs had been no mercenary, international marriage, an exchanging of ducats for a title. Her jewels were her only assets; un-

less her old half-brother, half-playfellow, Arthur Johnston, were a resource too.

It was with her will concentrated on her one ambition that she moved calculatingly toward her jewel cabinet this morning and took out the velvet cases one by one. She knew that many of them were empty now, but her mother's pearls would be intact, and several costly bits of inherited beauty. There were also old rings with gems, too fine to be hurt in value by their antiquated setting; old earrings she had never had reset or remodeled. She took up a pilfered case that had once contained a splendid emerald pendant, and had a peculiar pang of regret as she did so. She had seldom worn the jewel; but it had been Paul's first gift to her on their arrival in Paris after their marriage. She touched the spring idly—the lid flew up, revealing the missing pendant in all its splendour. Wonderingly she continued her investigation: box after box held its appointed treasure, restored.

Paul had won, then, and counted on her remaining ignorant of his duplicity. No, it was not duplicity; he had merely borrowed such pieces as she most infrequently wore to tide him over some lapse in funds. She wished he had been frank with her, but she rejoiced that it had been through her, even so indirectly, that help had come to him.

But the pleasure of touching again each one of these brilliant belongings gave way too swiftly to a new suspicion. Money there was now in plenty, apparently, from somewhere, but from where? If it was display

to allay anxiety on her part, it failed of its purpose. Paul's reluctance to explain, to suffer any reference to the breach between Prince Dimitri Nicolieff and himself, maddened her. He treated her like a child!

The mystic wheel had pronounced Paul untrue; he had himself admitted the cause of the duel to be a woman. Was he hourly deceiving her? On the other hand, she recalled the fact that, while accusing him of lack of frankness, she herself had made no mention of her recourse to the wheel, nor of Henri de Gaston's disloyalty to his friend. She confronted her own weakness and lack of force, ashamed, but she was unable to face life, any more than death, without Paul. She clung to her little shell of happiness, convinced against her will each day of its emptiness and falsehood. She realised that she forgave Paul each hour; not from principle, but by reason of the fascination he exerted over her. She was infatuated; she could not resist the charm of his personality, try as she might.

He knew it, this fascination he had for her, she told herself; he was victimising her through it. What possible reason could he have for not explaining away the stealthy mystery that separated them? Was it his desire to remain perfect in her eyes? Was he to sacrifice them both to that other woman, that earlier woman, who had cared enough for him to throw the price of her soul in the balance of his losing fate? Had he succumbed again, hard pressed? Had he accepted a later offer from H el ene? That was the one enigma she must solve. Prince Nicolieff's apparent connection with the

comédienne had set her brain aflame. If the Prince had discovered Paul's old debt, had he despised him for it, and cast him off under the first flimsy pretext? Had he, perhaps, certainty of a new debt recently incurred? What right-minded man, indeed, could respect another whose standing had been secured at such expense? In the morning sunshine, soon to bring summer bird-songs, her face grew older, her hopes more wintry.

Resolving to go to Arthur for help, she did not realise with her illogical reasoning what construction Paul must put upon money so obtained. Her suffering was too acute, too egotistical.

She had no exact idea what sum would be necessary, but it could not greatly exceed the value of her jewels. She could return it little by little. Nothing was impossible, except to remain an accessory to that woman's holding Paul in her debt.

She rang in a servant and ordered the motor. She would run over and present her difficulties to Arthur. She could no longer bear them alone. In her trouble the affinity of race asserted itself again. Arthur was of her native blood. He would understand. She eliminated Alice with careless ease. She would manage to speak with Arthur apart; she would mention in excuse her need of business advice as to the American markets. Besides, there were always other Americans about the hotel, with its sunny gardens and their Italian pergolas.

Her opportunity proved wonderfully favourable, and without strategy, for arrived at her destination she found

Alice and Mary Ingram already gone over to Monte Carlo. Arthur alone was on the wide terrace, ostensibly writing, in reality staring off toward Morocco.

The day was warm, and the sibylline palms hardly stirred in the soft breeze that came across the water from the desert. One could easily imagine one saw Tunis and Algiers, their white palaces dazzling in the glare of the tropic sun, as one gazed across toward the hazy African coast.

Vera had decided to take Arthur unreservedly into her confidence. No one knew better than she the vice and value of that form of flattery between a woman and a man. She knew how especially efficacious it could be with a man to whom she was not merely a pretty woman, and who was already ripe for such cajolery. She despised flattery as an art, but would resort to it as a necessity. She remembered that since the devil's first outcry to the Lord, to kneel before him and the world should be his, men had been enamoured of the show of power. To-day, in her weary scorn of men, poor Arthur came in for his share. She saw in advance his over-eager offers of assistance; how she should be obliged to curb the too zealous generosity that the pleasure of having her appeal to him would arouse.

Poor Vera! She led carefully up to the real reason of her visit, and laid its purport bare, always reserving the hidden sting of the situation, and saying no one word that could compromise Paul's dignity. But he listened with the old painful delight that her near presence always gave him; nothing more.

She said Paul's losses had been high; that debts of honour were unique and immediate; of course he, being a man, would understand these things better than she, and she had always felt his friendship different from that "les autres" offered her. She said his was a nature incomparably more lofty, inconceivably more above any misconception of her momentary trouble. In all her world she trusted him only; from him alone could she bring herself to ask advice.

She saw that it touched him to be thus convinced of her confidence, as she knew it would. It was not until she named the actual amount that she saw the transport fade from his face, and realised in a flash how things were. It was, after all, a yawning distance between vague offers of devotion by an admirer however sincere, and the need of instant financial succour. As a matter of fact, it was not lack of eagerness to serve her that embarrassed Arthur now, but the bitter fact that he was in no position to offer her what she asked. His constraint was pitiful. His own income, derived chiefly from his books, was far from munificent. Such fortune as one saw him in was due to Alice's inheritance, which she indeed had chiefly welcomed for his sake. He hated equally to refuse or explain. Either truth would condemn him in Vera's eyes, and despite his manliest and most loyal efforts he still supremely longed to shine there undimmed. What an opportunity this would have been to prove that his had been no changeful, childish fancy, but a life-long allegiance, firm under any strain of fate or test of time! Alice never leaned on him as Vera was

doing now; she spared him every care. But Vera laid her burden on his man's shoulders, and the dear weight of it inspired something long dormant in his unchallenged will. To temporise, at last—as most men do in an emergency too great for off-hand treatment—he confessed himself obliged to confer with Alice.

That was the American way. Vera had hoped against it, but she remembered well the family conclaves held in her foster-mother's home, and the free discussion by all of matters pertaining to the family budget. It was hard for her pride to have an outsider like Arthur's wife involved in her affairs, but between that chagrin and the vision of Héléne Prévile she speedily chose the lesser evil. It would have been vastly more agreeable to have played benefactor toward Alice; it was easy to be generous: one then held the strategic position. But now Alice held the point of vantage, for the first time in their contrasting experiences. In her heart, however much expediency warned her to a smiling finesse, Vera despised Arthur for his hesitation. For the first time, too, she realised the discrepancy between her own condonation of Paul's conduct and the reproaches of the world, were it informed. It was plain that Arthur's opinion of Paul had been lowered by the events of the past fortnight, and by Paul's reticence. Probably he had been offended that his well-meant sympathy was so distantly received, felt that he had been rebuked for a liberty. She had no idea how much Arthur knew. The tongues of men do not resemble those of angels at Monte Carlo, and indeed Paul de Hauteville was too brilliant a figure

to escape his share of malignant and often quite fictitious scandal; but Vera held her bliss in ignorance.

She cared too little for Arthur in himself to mind the personal humiliation that came of her errand. What hurt, was the realisation that Paul suffered somehow such diminution of esteem in her own eyes. She grew appalled to find herself suddenly doubting him again. She felt sure the chapter of H el ene and her money was not closed. Paul had grown moody of late; his high spirits had suffered a noticeable check; he brooded over the manner of his friends, as if seeking evidence of slight or coldness; and naturally there was a cause. She saw it all now plainly. Little social matters that he never gave a thought before seemed now to have importance in his eyes. He who had been assiduously courted by all the gay world was now courting attentions himself, attentions that had previously been his by instinctive right, to admit or ignore. He avoided, of course, any too outward deference or self-seeking, with the taste and tact that marked his breeding, yet Vera felt now a motive and a desire to please that had not before been one of his social attributes,—and was stung by it. It bespoke an uncertainty of himself wholly foreign to him. He who had never descended to the level of ingratiating, had now grown aware of the esteem or disesteem of others, and gave the effect of a man who fancies himself on the brink of some peril.

Paul's intimacy with men and women of the highest rank in Europe had always been a thing to take for granted. It excluded any conscious pride. Once threat-

ened, however, he learned the meaning and value of it all, and became vulnerable. The case of Prince Nicotieff left him on the defensive. His love of approbation was intense, even though he had only now learned the existence of it. Self-confidence, abnormally developed by his popularity, both in England and on the Continent, grew weaker. Enmity was new to him, and he feared its consequences. The prince had been asked for his resignation at the English club, but Paul knew the temper of the socially mighty too well to suppose the episode, therefore, closed in his favour; or closed in any sense whatever. He knew that the innuendos of a prince could harm him in quarters more sacred and vital than those of this justice-dealing club, made up as it was of men of all nationalities and all shades of pedigree.

He had been annoyed by the reappearance of H  l  ne; scarcely more. It was the reopening of a chapter long closed. Yet he owed her something, if only for a certain distraction he had found in her after his mother's death had left him rich and alone. She had once given him a love worthy    better end than contempt or annoyance. It was "pas la peine" to affront her now; to break with her melodramatically, as if she were just the usual indiscretion of one's youth. He was too indifferent toward her. Their old score had been wiped out years ago. The trifling sum she had offered him at the gaming table he had accepted with a gambler's fever for play, and the European's unconcern; paid and lost again. It was simply that race week had lost him more than he could at once recoup, without re-

course to the sum he had set aside for Vera on their marriage, or to Héléne once more. His friends were always tossing money about and ready to lend it, and why should he not borrow? He was scrupulous at first as to exact settlements, but it mattered so little to them apparently, that gradually even his gambler's honour melted into the aristocrat's indifference toward mere bourgeois rectitude in business.

He began to give his notes widely, and was permitted to date them as far ahead as he chose. He did not realise at first how deeply he was involving his credit. Then, after a game one night, when he had been winning, some one hinted that it was his turn now to pay his losses, and reckoning them all he realised that even such capital as his could no longer bear the strain of the high play he had indulged in. He was constantly driven by the swift necessity of obtaining money to meet notes, or sacrifice his social caste. Vera, seeing him moody and distrait by these troubles, grew bitter at his continued reticence, and miserable over her suspicions as to the cause.

Once she surprised him sitting dejectedly at his desk, staring at the Delphic Sibyl, as if lost in memories, or imploring counsel. To her gentle enquiry, "What is it, Paul? What distresses you—money?" he had responded only with a light shrug and:

"Nothing that need concern you, chérie."

"Qui vous touche me blesse," she reminded him, laying her hand fondly on his hair. "What is it, Paul?"

"It is Fate," he replied, and she had withdrawn her

ready word of tenderness, as if Hélène and Saturn the baneful had been one and the same.

He was fond and passionate with her by turn, and sometimes a certain desperate note crept into his soft voice; but she had steeled herself not to yield to his seductive sweetness while this shadow lay between them. She held herself more and more aloof from him, tormenting herself with recollections of his past love and of his present lack of confidence toward her. If he did not love her, then his endearments and caresses were mere cajolery, and she would resentfully spurn them. His reserve held her still from the questions that would insure her peace. Paul, meantime, thought her happiness assured if only he could keep the surface of existence free from menace toward her. He must preserve from her his secrets, inviolate, at all cost; from his troubling thoughts she must be kept in ignorance; while all the time she hardened under what she considered his deliberate deceit.

Daily their estrangement grew. If Vera hoped that he would break through the barrier between them and demand the old, free satisfaction, or even an explanation of her cold face, she reckoned without the pride of the de Hautevilles. He carried himself like any man intrenched in honour. His myriad social engagements claimed him; his clubs saw him in his accustomed place; the life of the villas and gilded cafés counted him as ever a brilliant and expected feature. Punctiliously he performed his routine of pleasure, as a star shining in its appointed orbit. But all the time he grew more silent

to the world, and at home his silence became morose, like that of a man preoccupied with painful thoughts and oblivious of others. He never spoke an ungentle word to Vera; he played unremittingly his rôle of courtly adorer; but she knew that he was playing, and she was the more powerless herself to win back the old, undimmed radiance of their lives together. In one thing they were in accord; they grew to avoid being alone, as they had once jealously guarded their amorous solitude.

Where were his smiles lavished now? was Vera's cry in her heart. Where did Paul's heart overflow?

Not with Hélène Prévile, if Vera could but have known it. The Frenchwoman's love rankled with the sting of Paul's public and private discard, and she would not have welcomed him if he came to her. For sake of the white-faced child, his wife, he had ignored her, had refused even the help she would have offered him again! Preferred ruin to restoration through her! Humiliation there could not be more exasperating. It was Vera's fault, of course,—Vera whom it was impossible to harm save through Paul. She must find the means.

Into the heart of the Frenchwoman entered hate of the man who had twice wronged her, first by his forgetfulness, and second through his loyalty to another. Her old passion receded, and left in its place a deadly resentment, like unto nothing save the love of Ammon, "who hated with a hate as great as was the love wherewith he had loved."

CHAPTER XVII

BY THE ADVICE OF OMAR

ARTHUR was having his difficulties in the meantime.

Though Omar sang, "Then take the cash and let the credit go," it was not an easy thing for a husband to ask a wife for money to aid an old sweetheart's husband. In every light Arthur's task began to grow more and more ungrateful. If Alice had been less generous, the problem would have simplified itself; but his own obligation to her was actually sufficient to make the request to which he was committed seem banal. Vera had never chosen to win Alice, had never shown herself to her in any of the dear and captivating phases of old; on the contrary there was a neutrality between them of which he could not be but aware. And after all, it was not for Vera herself that this loan was so critically desired, but for Paul. Alice would see this at a glance, and wonder why Count de Hauteville had not made his demands himself. It would reveal itself to her keen gaze as an odd situation enough from the start.

It would naturally strike Alice that one man might better ask a loan from another than let his wife appeal for it privately, and to a man who plainly was not unmoved by her old fascination.

Arthur had never been obliged to meet any such

emergency without Alice at his elbow to suggest and inspire. Yet Vera had turned to him in her straits, and all the chivalry of his nature went out to her appeal. Her position was so touching in its helplessness; her beautiful eyes turned to him as the only fellow mortal on whom she could conjure up the ghost of a claim. Her femininity laid its bonds upon him, led him captive. It had been hard at first for him to accept the thrilling spectacle of her happiness with another, as he had been forced to do. It healed his resentment oddly now to perceive the discrepancy between appearance and the decently buried facts. He did not wish her to be unhappy, he was only male brute enough to breathe easier that her idol had come to the level of the other men that she had ignored in her upward gaze. But this little pang of jealous triumph did not persist; he was too sweet natured to have borne any thought so viciously small. After all he had only the burning to help her, to show her the fealty that should vindicate her trust in him.

He treated the matter with dignity and complete frankness when his plan had been duly matured for Alice's consideration. He put it as his wish to accommodate Vera temporarily, and suggested a loan from Alice to himself, to be considered as an advance on the royalties from his books, which had hitherto been kept intact for the children's education by and by.

"You see, dear, it will be repaid years before we shall want to use it for Dorothy and Tom," he explained assuringly.

Alice's expression showed that she did see—all that he

had intended her to see, and a great deal more. She replied without hesitation:

"Let me see if I get your idea correctly. You mean for me to advance immediately, through Baring Brothers, by cable, a certain sum which you will secure by the money to be received from your books, the fund we had set aside for the children. Well, it would mean cutting our credit here down to zero, till your royalty money was due—until it reached us in Paris. It would imperil the children's deposit eventually, too."

She spoke as if rapidly calculating an already accomplished fact, not as if in preparation for a refusal.

"Truth has never suspected her husband's frailty until recently, very recently," he urged, as if to avert the unspoken criticism in Alice's opinion of her. "Naturally it has shaken her, and terrified her, poor child! She must straighten out their liabilities, and then she can go ahead and manage things differently. More as you do."

"Did she say that?"

"Not exactly, but she has often spoken of your wonderful management."

"Did you tell her why you never played with her husband?"

"Why should I? I had no inclination to play even if I had not bound myself by my promise to you."

"Do you realise now why I asked you for that promise?"

"To save what might easily have been thrown away, I suppose."

Alice's eyes were brighter for this admission of her own discernment.

"No, Arthur, it was more complicated than that. I knew Paul de Hauteville, for his own reasons, would never bring himself to borrow of you. That was self-evident; but any sum he could win from you,——" she broke off, then resumed hastily. "Ah, that would have been another matter altogether! Loans and debts of honour are not in the same class."

"You are the most acute observer of human nature in the world!" cried Arthur, with homage in his every inflection. "But Count de Hauteville knows nothing of Truth's request of me."

"Of course not; and he would not permit it if he did. He is a gambler born. But he is a perfect gentleman, by the artificial code of honour of his world."

"But even if he refuses, I must help Truth," said Arthur. "I cannot desert her. I have no alternative."

"He would refuse if he divined where the money came from. Neither she nor you seem to understand the trouble it would make for all three. As far as I am concerned you shall help her, of course, Arthur. No man could do less, and the business part of it you have arranged very simply; it can be rapidly put through."

But from the actual performance of the deed Arthur shrank. He had been driven farther by the fervour of his pleading than his actual intentions warranted.

"I can see well enough you do not approve of it," she said regretfully. "I ought not to risk it, Alice; I know that. It is a risk, of course, considering de Hauteville; but I must not fail Truth. I can't do that."

"Nonsense! You must risk it," she justified him valiantly. "There are some things a man has to do even if

he is sure to lose, if he has any man in his make-up! Manhood constrains. It is a nobler motto than noblesse oblige!"

"Truth will appreciate it," said Arthur gravely.

"But that has not the least thing to do with *my* motives!" exclaimed Alice. "She is a woman who accepts. Her husband has always idolised her; she has been no help to him except as love is always enriching, never wasted. His is the stronger soul of the two, in spite of his one great weakness, or any amount of youthful follies. Her scheme of life conceives feminine generosity as bad for men. In one way she is right, for the selfish woman is really the most abnegating in the end, since she perfects another soul at the cost of her own perfection. She redeems the man while the selfishly generous woman saves herself by him, making him weak and selfish as she grows strong and free by habitual denial and sacrifice. Vera de Hauteville is what Paul has made her; his other self. She is not great enough to resist him, or lift him up, or even out of his own mysticism."

It was a pitiless exposition, but Alice did not shrink from it. She meant to be "Captain of her soul." Sincerity was dearer to her than her ease. Paul had always interested her more than Vera; more than any of the little circle within that larger one into which they had been thrown of late. Henri de Gaston had oftenest been her companion, for he openly admired her, and found endless amusement in "learning to speak American" from her gay lips. She reckoned him near his full worth too. Wrenski she found a constant ally, and simple-

hearted von Wreden, and the brave youth, Colonel Lyndon-Carr; but more than all these the reserved personality of Paul de Hauteville fascinated her and held her interest,—reminded her of another, whose undercurrents of being had once almost swayed her from the foundation rock of principle.

Paul's nature, at once so conventional, so solitary, so mystical, was well calculated to allure the introspection of such a nature as her own. Much of the warp and woof of his individuality was of an early weaving whose significance she could but faintly surmise. His romantic devotion to his mother; that devotion, almost a cult among Frenchmen, had left him at her death singularly exposed to the charms of feminine sympathy, and those first mysterious forces of adolescence that so little comprehend themselves. His mother's memory was a shrine where flowers of devotion always freshly bloomed, and lights were never suffered to burn out. Her wishes were still sacred to him. Her pensioners were never forgotten; her Saint's day never passed without a mass for her soul in the cathedral near his boyhood home, with its chapel, now solitary, awaiting his last return. If her memory did not inspire him to the heroism of pure living or exalted ideals it still remained something cherished, lovely and apart; untarnished by regret or time, the sacred possession of his soul as boy and man.

It was this love, denied its life-long object, that had been lavished on Vera. For no other living creature had this solitary-hearted man, outwardly so riant and *débonnaire*, any deeper feeling than that indifference which he

bestowed equally on all his fellow-men. He had set her up in the sacredest of his shrines, and his pride was bright in the consciousness that she was his only living friend as truly as his only love. Her instinctive coldness gave her an added charm in his exclusive eyes. The manner of the European had been hers by instinct,—there had been no need to impress it upon her. He had exulted in their absorption in each other, as in her success among his friends, which had drawn the cords yet closer about his heart. She had no rival with him, save his fatal love of play.

So the days of their first estrangement left him lonely, powerless to assuage his gathering melancholy. Never since those first vacant days succeeding his mother's death had he felt so inwardly forsaken. He prolonged his absences from home, to spare himself a return unwelcomed. Averted eyes were now too often all that awaited him. His heart clung tenaciously to his wilful love, watched pathetically for some hint of relenting, some signal to approach; but none was made. The attitude of the prince was spreading its slow contamination, till an almost imperceptible coolness began to make itself felt in his tormented suspicion.

"You are going out, chérie?" he asked, meeting Vera in afternoon costume one day as he came in. "I am glad I came in time to wish you success as always; à la bonne heure!"

Vera, in white cloth gown and soft white hat with nodding plumes, with no colour anywhere but a great bunch of *réséda* at her belt, a demeanour uniting the sim-

plicity of a schoolgirl with the perfection of a grande dame, was as chic as any consummate Frenchwoman of them all. He followed her into the music-room, where she went to search hurriedly for some music among the piles on the piano. He wondered if she could be delaying purposely in this; if she hated to leave him as he hated to have her go.

"You are going to play?" he asked in astonishment, as she selected a piece with violin obligato and pulled out some of von Wreden's cello parts from a stack of trios. "And you have not told me," he added, with tender reproach. "Vera! I tell you all my secrets."

Her hand trembled a little; she did not look up.

"You have not told me the cause of your quarrel with the prince, though I have asked you several times," she reminded him.

"And if there was no cause?"

"Men do not duel without a cause."

"Often! presque toujours!" he cried, in contradiction.

"Why did he insinuate that you, of all men, were not a gentleman," she began again, her tongue loosed; "that he could not accept a favour from you? How did he dare? If the reason is not a woman, it is some disgraceful truth, something you are determined to keep from me."

"Nothing that concerns you," he said indifferently; "do not insist on mingling your dear self in the stupid affairs of men."

"A woman in the affairs of men would concern me

very closely if one of the men happened to be my husband——”

“Your lover,” he corrected.

She shook her head impatiently, and the weary expression settled more heavily on his face.

“Vera,” he remonstrated, “I do not lie, as you know. I give you my word, my sacred word of honour, the cause of my duel with the prince had no connection with any living woman, or with any act of mine. The prince had been drinking, as you know; he lost his temper,—c'est tout. Why will you spoil our life by distressing yourself about this? It is nothing. It is passed, too. Come, chere chérie, make a friendship with me!”

He came and stood before her with outstretched hands. “My days and nights are too sad when your love is refused me. Be kind to me again.”

“You know well enough how you can win me back.” She did not raise her eyes; perhaps she did not see the hands outstretched to her.

“And you know, chérie, that you are the one being I love in all the world. Do not be cruel to me. You will kill me with your unbelief.”

She hardened herself against the passionate voice, with its new note of sadness and its old beloved modulations. This was the way he had always won her over in the past. Now her trust in his love had failed her, and she demanded sterner proof. She wanted to believe his word, to wrap her heart once more in its old sweet delusion, but she would not. She could not permit herself again the luxury of his love. He might have saved her by the

truth, or her love might have lifted her above the caring for it; but he had chosen to refuse his confidence, and she would not be swerved aside. She moved as if to leave him.

"I do not belong to the Latin races," she said cuttingly, "to whom the truth is a last alternative; discreditable to the able-minded and a reflection upon the imagination. Prince Nicolieff refused you satisfaction. Until I know why, I must refuse you justification. I am your wife, and it is my right to defend you. How can I do so without your justification in my heart? Oh, Paul," she went on, "that terrible night I did something in my frenzy that I never supposed myself capable of. I asked your mystic wheel,—Is he fidèle?"

"And the number?"

"It was not there. It fell below; among the unlucky ones."

At her first mention of the wheel his glance intensified. "You asked only this one question, or others as well?"

"One,—before this."

"What was it?"

"If you would make a safe return."

"You got an affirmative?"

"Yes."

He smiled a swift, bright smile of satisfaction. "At what hour did you make your interrogations, please?"

"The first time, in the afternoon, after I had seen Arthur; the second, when I believed I was going mad at your not coming; only a short time before you came."

"How long had you been asleep when I came?" he asked eagerly.

The question struck her as irrelevant.

"I don't know, or care," she added miserably; "*ça ne fait rien!*"

"But I care," he insisted; "for me it makes all. The wheel cannot lie. Please try to recall the hour, *chérie*, if you can possibly."

"The first time was in the afternoon; the second, after I gave up hoping for you. The house was asleep. I could not bear it any longer. I remember the clock struck one while I stood there trying to decide if I dared or not. What earthly difference does it make?"

"*Eh bien!*" cried Paul, the colour rushing into his pale face, "you made your calculations accordingly, of course?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, startled by his excitement.

"You took the number of the day of the month for your first, and the number of the next following day for your second basis of calculation? It was after midnight when you made your second enquiry?"

The object of his questioning became clear to her, and she faced him in confusion.

"Why, no, I did not think of that. I used the same date number, the ninth, for both calculations," she admitted.

"Which refutes all," replied Paul, singularly unmoved. Then more sternly than he had ever spoken to her he added: "This is not your affair, Vera, as I have said."

You ought not to have trifled with it. Nor is a science five hundred years more ancient than the Christian era to be treated like a gipsy soothsayer at a charity bazaar. In future, if you wish to inform yourself concerning the intimate things of my life, ask me, if you please; it will be better."

His manner carried authority. He was master, and master he intended to remain. Her meddling had aroused something in him that her suffering had failed to touch.

"These absences make me old," shuddered Vera in defence.

"They have been necessary," he replied briefly. "It was to save my future, and yours; I was unexpectedly obliged to find money with which to meet my notes. It is not so easy as you women think, Vera." His voice rang dispirited, weary, broken. "I have been forced to go here, there, everywhere. My family have too often come forward and helped me. I was ashamed to turn to them again."

"Then thank God this disgraceful necessity is at an end!" she cried impulsively. "I shall have two thousand pounds for you to-morrow,—for your liberation." There was no joy in her voice now, only determination.

"You are mad, Vera," he said quietly. He did not undeceive her as to the inadequacy of the sum she named so proudly. Then, with a sickening eagerness that he could not entirely repress, he asked her:

"What have you done? What do you mean me to understand?"

"Only what any woman would do to save her husband."

Paul groaned. His heart was broken with terror lest Hélène had carried out her threat to involve him through the unsuspecting instrumentality of Vera. "What would you do for me, Vera? How much?" he asked wistfully.

"Everything!" She gave him a brilliant smile, throwing back her head to meet his troubled eyes.

"For the love of God, speak!" he besought, his Gallic blood rising under her calm. "If you really have this blessed money from heaven, to drive away this nightmare, when shall you have it in your hands? Where has it come from? Tell me! Vite, Vera, vite!"

"Arthur gave it to me," she said contentedly, with a triumphant nod of her head.

"You have received money from Monsieur Johnston?" Paul's lips quivered with pain. "Vera!"

It was as if she had dealt him a physical blow. Then as he shrank away from her for the first time in his life, she was frightened.

"Listen, Paul," she said, laying her hand on his arm, unable to stand without support. "I asked Arthur frankly for a loan. I want to set you free from a chain that I am sure must exist to torment you hourly, though you will never admit it to me. I have no one in the world but you and this American, who was like a half-brother to me at home; whose mother was the only mother I have ever known. I have done nothing that

any high-minded woman might not do openly and without reproach. It is purely an affair of business; he will not lose one centime by it in the end. You must use it to set matters right, and then we will go away from this false-hearted place, into the Swiss mountains, or anywhere out of the world, and wait for the passing of these wretched clouds, these hideous memories."

"You believe I will accept this money?"

"You cannot refuse."

"I do refuse. I will never use one centime from a former admirer of the Comtesse de Hauteville, my wife."

Vera shrugged her shoulders tantalisingly. "Melodrama is out of place between us," she said. "You draw a fine distinction between points of honour, mon ami. You were ready to win a hundred times this amount from him at cards, when he had no least chance against you, and might easily have lost all his little fortune, earned by his own brain and hand."

"Il ne faut pas parler de ça," said Paul impatiently.

"Paul," she begged, overcome by disappointment, "you cannot mean you will refuse me!"

"Is it that you believe me capable of benefitting by the favour of a man friend of my wife?" His anger burned like a white flame.

"How is it better to profit by the generosity of a woman friend of your own?"

Vera could not resist the retort. Her heart suffocated in her, but some evil spirit urged her on. She wanted

to stop, but could not; she had lost control of the situation, and felt it with dismay.

"I do not comprehend you," he said courteously; "nor of whom you believe yourself speaking."

"Oh, yes, I think you do; I know you do——"

"I have myself no women friends," said Paul disdainfully, a disdain that seemed to include her in its scope. "I have borrowed money of no woman, if that is the thought behind your insinuation. It degrades us both to permit you to speak such words to me. You have allowed yourself to become unjust, displeased with me, all without reason. I have never given one wishful glance toward any woman but you since our first encounter. Is it not true?"

It was true, but she remained obstinately silent.

"You have yourself often mocked me for too blind a devotion. *Petite méchante! C'est à rire!* What comedy have you been playing with yourself? What could you possibly have in your mind?" he cried playfully, eager to terminate their misunderstanding; "not Madame Johnston certainly?"

"Do not try to make her ridiculous," warned Vera; "she is too noble for you to understand."

"*Bien.* But not any other of the American colony surely? You do not, I presume, accuse me of taking money in secret from Lady Kintore, *par exemple?*" The unfeigned sarcasm of his indifference angered her again.

"No, of *Hélène Prévile, the comédienne.*" she said tersely, walking away toward the long window that opened on the balcony.

A swift expression of pain drew Paul's white brow into deeper lines, but he kept his self-command perfectly. He followed her across the room, and stood beside her looking on the balcony that overhung the sea. Above their heads hung the lamp whose beams had called her home that night from the moon-struck waves.

"Explain if you please, Vera," he said quietly.

"The explanations are for you to make," she retorted.

"You want an explanation of my relation to H el ene Pr eville? Why?"

"No," she said defiantly, speaking with slow distinctness, so that every word cut clear, "I need none. You took money once from her, a notorious woman, an actress. Prince Dimitri knew of it, probably from her. It was beneath the standard of a gentleman for you to do so, especially if you repeated the offence. He could not refuse your challenge, not being a coward, but he could and can still refuse your hand. To accept money from a woman of her class was worse than an open insult to me. I threw away my pride to get money for you, and you have refused it with such injured virtue! I wanted to set you free from her power for ever, and reinstate you before the world. I will not have it otherwise."

"I am not in her power," said Paul haughtily. "I have accepted nothing of any woman since I met you. I owe nothing to any woman."

She threw out her hands with a hopeless gesture of incredulity. Suddenly his whole being softened to her.

"If you have time for me,—time to listen to me, I will

recount to you a strange, sad story, that will move your heart to tears, *chérie*. But if you do not believe me it will only leave us farther apart, no nearer to our former happiness. And I cannot tell it while you stand off there with the Sepoy mutiny in your dearest face."

He put his arm coaxingly about her, and drew her out into the sunshine on the balcony.

"Comme c'est bonne!" he sighed. "Come here and sit on the arm of my chair, as in those marvellous days of our happiness, and I will relate to you a tale as pitiful as it is common, and foolish perhaps."

Still inwardly dissenting, she let him lead her outside and enthrone her beside him, while the breath of the *réséda* and *heliotrope* in the garden sweetened the afternoon about them.

"Forgive me for speaking so to you, Paul," she faltered wistfully, already slipping under the charm of his spell.

"Vera is always an angel," was his sweeping reply.

He did not spare himself in the telling of his tale. He portrayed the youth from the provinces, with Paris before him and his mother's tomb behind, and then the love of a woman like *Hélène Prévile*, older than himself, of course, bewildering, uncalculating. He dwelt, not perhaps quite unintentionally, on the days of that first passion; estimating not unwisely its effect upon Vera, since women value more a man whom other women desire, even though they will not admit the rivalry. He lingered over the recital of their parting, as if he remembered it for the first time; paying a tribute of grati-

tude to her for her self-sacrifice in placing money to his account at his bankers without a clew to its source. She let him believe that his relatives had come to his aid in this his first distracted complication in the ways of the world. He supposed for a long time he had been saved by money from his own estates. Nothing could have been nobler, or effected with greater delicacy, he declared in resumé.

It was not until he approached the present, that Vera grew apprehensive again.

"When my recent troubles arose, she again offered me unlimited credit, through her avocat. She was in despair at my refusal of a sum that was nothing to her now in comparison with what she had done for me before. I refused, risking ruin, for your sake. I shall find the money, or win it. I have surmounted many difficulties in my life, and I shall get over this hurdle alone, as I have in the past. The only thing that troubles me is your committing me, in your heart, to a course no man of honour could take. You did not see that you were unwise, if not imprudent, and unjust toward your poor Paul."

Vera leaned her head lightly over his hair; a moth kiss could not have been more ethereal.

"I am sorry, Paul," she said. But her anxiety getting the better of her again, she added: "If you will only take this money from Arthur."

"We will never speak of that again, mignonne. I shall find what I need. Have no anxiety about it,"

"Where?" she faltered.

"That is my affair, petite," he said soothingly, as he laid his lips upon hers.

Von Wreden, stepping at this moment unannounced upon the balcony, swore at himself for intruding upon a love scene too intimate for alien eyes.

"O schönes zeit der erster liebe!" he murmured. He stood an instant, smiling a mute benediction, before he continued wistfully:

"Ach! it is a shame that such as Sudermann should ever write such words as 'Es war aber es ist vorbei.' No, it is always, always first love. Not so, Paul? Not so, both of you, my dear, good friends? How the nightingale in the soul ever singing is, when man has the true love! Only wait. Father love, mother love, lover's love, makes always the Frühling. Ach! if the little one were but now only with us!"

Quick tears started to his eyes at the thought of his little lost child, his vanished "Liebchen." Vera's voice could not be trusted, as Paul took the cordial, friendly hand in both his own and pressed it reverently.

"But the time, are you forgetting it not?" cried von Wreden, after a moment of silence, binding them all three in its sacred sympathy. "We shall now even hardly in season arrive at our concert. And it is for the hospital of suffering little ones we give our music! Schrecklich! Bitte, schnell!"

"Will you come with us, Paul?" asked Vera. "You know I cannot play unless you are there. I was terribly nervous to attempt it——"

"With the greatest pleasure in the world," Paul said,

raising her hands to his lips and kissing each separate finger, for luck. "May these little hands be inspired as never before!"

And in the haste of their departure, the excitement of the music that followed, and Paul's enraptured praise afterward, Vera overlooked the fact that concerning the cause of Prince Nicolieff's affront he had spoken no one enlightening word. Once more he had won her over on his own terms.

Wrenski, observing the quickened relation between them, was the more conscious of inexplicable blankness in his own immediate outlook. But it was Henri de Gaston, with a bravado that deceived nobody, who said, as the de Hauteville motor sped away through the crepuscule toward the Villa: "I wish some one were going to be as kind to me as she will be to him this night!"

CHAPTER XVIII

FRANÇOIS

THERE was some one with the master of the villa in the writing-room below. The low murmur of their voices was just distinguishable to old François as he moved about his morning supervision on the drawing-room floor, changing a rose in one vase, drawing a feathery fern forward into the sunshine, banking the mantel with lilies which the gardener had brought in from the conservatories. But though he touched and retouched his work with loving care, corrected a fauteuil set at an awkward angle, straightened a rug, shook a fold of drapery into more graceful lines, his mind was not upon his occupation.

François had not lived all his life in the principality of Monaco without knowing that the appearance of a Jew was the gathering of a storm. Yesterday a strange avocat had been closeted with Monsieur le Comte for an hour or more. To-day a money lender appeared, and François had received orders to admit him. Even the intoxicating odours of his beloved flowers had no charm to lighten the oppression which the sequence of events was causing in the heart of the old butler.

He stooped, without reproving himself or straightening his shoulders when the long mirrors reflected his increasing infirmity. Undeniably he was no longer young.

He had lived through enough melodrama to have filled many a stage, had been trusted with strange secrets and known the inside truths of many an outside mystery in his life. He prided himself that his service had been only with the families of the "grande monde." But never had he served a master or mistress with a sincerer sentiment than that which he had offered to Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse de Hauteville. Their youth and splendour appealed to him, and the consideration shown him by madame did the rest. Vera's personal kindness during the recent illness of his wife, countless little evidences of the just valuation she put upon his services; her tactful reliance on his taste in the matters of decoration or dinner service and plate on great occasions, completely won his allegiance. If trouble were coming now it meant more to François than a mere change of duties and location. He grieved over these dimly apprehended possibilities of change and misfortune, though quite unconfirmed in his forebodings of evil.

And while he kept his industrious vigil, anxious to show the unwonted stranger out of the gates before any of the under men should learn his presence, on the other side of the white panelled door, with its frivolous gold tracery, Paul de Hauteville was facing his highest hurdle alone.

Yesterday Héliène Préville's lawyer had sought him out, with the disconcerting announcement that his client now held all the Comte de Hauteville's notes. By subterfuge no doubt she had gathered them in from various quarters. With the notes in hand she was willing, it seemed,

to protect the Comte de Hauteville—on her own terms. If not—the alternative was easily enough conjectured.

Whatever the astute servant of the law may have thought, either of his fair client, or of her infatuation for this impassive man before him, who neither in face nor figure betrayed any hint of perturbation at the astounding proposition made him, he divulged nothing beyond the bare matter of his errand. When Paul protested against the underhand methods that had put him in the power of Madame Prévile he had only offered a smiling objection. "Few men would oppose so flattering a success, with so beautiful a conquest!" he said.

For a long hour he stated and restated the object of his mission. He was far from maladroit. His client begged an interview, he said; only a brief interview; an opportunity to put herself right before the distinguished consideration of Monsieur le Comte. It was true, Monsieur le Comte was at liberty to hand the sum of the notes to him, the avocat, within two days;—for a slight compensation the plans of madame might be made to miscarry, even now, and the notes be paid without her knowledge or intervention. He paused at this point, to see if his insinuation caught the attention of Monsieur le Comte. "Corrupt me!" was his unspoken invitation.

In a flash Paul saw the man's disloyalty to his client, his willingness to betray her for his personal gain; and thereby might hang his own (Paul's) chance of exit from this blind alley in which he was. "Le quart d'heure de Rabelais," was plainly upon him. But outwardly he remained calm.

“This is very unwelcome news you have brought me,” he said simply. “I regret to find myself inconceivably tricked by a woman whom I have always sincerely esteemed. I cannot believe that a reputable avocat, of an establishment so distinguished as that which you have the honour to represent, would mix in such an affair, if he were not ignorant of facts and probable consequences. I can only beg you to present to madame, your client, the assurance of my profound appreciation of her proposals, and my final and entire refusal of them.”

The avocat waited for more, fitting finger to finger of his avaricious hands, and balancing the chances of the situation to a nicety. Paul’s hand meantime slipped toward the electric bell. The interview, for him, was over. The lawyer was about to press his own opportunities further, but the emotionless voice of the count stopped him.

“For her, c’est tout. This suffices. It is finished, monsieur; you understand? For yourself now, monsieur, listen to me. Day after to-morrow, at noon precisely, you shall receive the full sum of all the notes, with a thousand francs in addition; a little acknowledgment of your personal service and courtesy in the matter. My avocat will wait upon you, and attend to it that the agreement is carried out in detail.”

The fingers of the listener met evenly at the nails now. He had hoped the count’s price would have been higher; but madame his client, as it happened, had not been too generous with him, and to offend so high a gentleman as Comte de Hauteville might not have proved a good

stroke, even at better profit. He bowed with a deference worthy of François himself, and began:

“Monsieur le Comte may rest assured——” but Paul cut him short, handing him a card across the table.

“The address of my *avocat*,” he said, “who will find you at noon on Saturday.”

As he spoke he rang, François answering with open door almost before his master's hand had touched the bell. As far as wit and word went, the interview had gone to Paul's triumph, but the reaction brought him to realise the proportions of the task he had set himself to do. In two days he must get an enormous sum actually in hand. From whom? From where? Again and again his relatives had come to his rescue in such ordeals, and could not be relied on now. His own fortune was all but dissipated. In time, perhaps, he could have collected the sum himself, but time was not an element to count upon or trust when one dealt with a woman who loved, whose passion to serve had been turned to hatred and vindictiveness, whose animus was the fury of “a woman scorned.”

What to do? The answer baffled him. Arthur Johnston had come to him and shown him the note in Vera's hand, written at his own instigation, rejecting the loan she had petitioned. Arthur begged him to reconsider and accept it;—offering it to him “Man to man, as we say in America.” But strenuously as Paul was pressed, his pride had kept him firm. He admitted a temporary embarrassment, but quite refused to treat the matter seri-

ously. And after a night of sleepless reflection he had sent for the Jew whose presence was at this moment rankling in the dejected breast of François.

It was a case for extreme measures. Paul loathed the creature he had summoned, but he could treat him as an inferior, and no Jew would ever refuse a loan to one of such superior social standing as his own, leaving aside the financial reputation of his family. His mother's name was that of one of the best-known banking houses in Germany. The money-lender might be trusted to know as much of his family tree as Paul himself. There would be no trouble at first. But afterward? He refused to contemplate that. For the present he could free himself from Hélène's persecution, make himself at once independent. Afterward, luck must help him. Human foresight was blind beyond this initial step, and Fate must guide him.

The interview went as smoothly as he had hoped. The extent of his ruin was not guessed even in Jewish circles. The villa was intact. The money-lender, though he demanded an outrageously usurious interest, was suavely eager to oblige, gracious in all details.

But when the dates of payment came, in due course, his plaint was different.

"Money was, alas! just now, as never, so in demand!" he deplored, wringing his jewelled hands respectfully. "It could hardly be arranged to be renewed for more than a week; ten days, perhaps, at the longest. One week, say, since Monsieur le Comte so desired it—and actually it was but an honour to oblige

him—but at a higher rate of interest. A third more, yes? For perhaps another week, yes.”

Something deep in his blood stirred Paul to out-Jew this Jew opposing him. With a curious thrill he told himself that if he could not pay, he need not live. And if he did not live, what little he had settled on Vera could not be touched by any one. The two men looked into each other's faces, each fearing the other; each privately scorning the other for the common blood he bore. Paul was the first to break the silence.

“You may draw up the agreements immediately,” he said curtly.

“As you will, Monsieur le Comte,” acquiesced the Jew, pulling a chair up to the table and lighting the inevitable cigar uninvited. As he wrote he chatted familiarly on indifferent subjects. Paul made no response. He took the document at last, reading and signing it, in silence.

“You will make the rencontre with my avocat at noon precisely, if you please,” he reminded him, with a tone of command. “You will have with you this money in gold. There are to be no transactions on paper.”

The Jew, still wringing his jewelled hands in homage, backed himself out; François shutting the door behind him with a face that was a study in indecision. He did not withdraw at once from his master's presence, but wavered and entered the open door of the writing-room, as if to straighten the misplaced chairs. Paul was still at his table.

“Give me the cognac, François,” he said hastily.

The old man poured out the liquid swiftly, and stood

watching his young master gravely from behind his chair.

"Monsieur est malade?" he ventured timidly.

"It is nothing," said Paul lightly, but a shiver ran over him as he spoke. "There is not enough sunshine in this corner of the villa," objected the servant, making an excuse to linger, throwing back the windows and letting in the fresh morning air. He refilled the empty cognac glass as he spoke again. "It is too damp here. Monsieur suffers perhaps from a soupçon of chill. It is necessary to ward it off." Encouragingly he placed the refilled glass at his master's elbow once more.

Again an irresistible shiver shook Paul's frame. He stared dully at François, as if in envy of his humble, peaceful lot; who of us has not at some bitter moment envied a simpler being? He was waiting, too, for the man to go, to be left to himself. The strain he had imposed so long on his control was breaking. He felt that he could bear it just until François should have left the room. But François showed an unprecedented determination to linger.

"Monsieur le Comte is truly ill," he repeated; not as a question, but as a sad fact this time. "One can do nothing?"

"Yes. Go to the crystal vial in my dressing-room and measure me forty drops,—vite!" cried Paul, to be alone. But François was back again in a flash, with the vial. Paul swallowed the dose he brought quickly.

"My heart,—it is nothing. Do not speak to madame."

He let his head fall upon his hands.

For a few unbroken minutes the old butler, with his hands clasped, stared mutely at his young master in the grip of this misery which he was powerless to prevent or assuage. But perhaps it was not beyond him either. Hesitatingly he advanced.

"Pardon, pardon. Monsieur le Comte feels himself a little better?" Paul raised his head wearily and glanced about the familiar room. It was flooded now with sunshine that touched the bent grey head before him. A boyish impulse swept over him to confide in this devoted old fellow.

"How life is blind!" he muttered, half to himself; and then aloud: "Were you ever in need of money, François?" he asked abruptly.

It was all the old man wanted. He stood there respectful, solicitous, eager, frightened at his own presumption.

"If Monsieur le Comte would only have the so great kindness; would only condescend to permit to François the great favour——" he begged haltingly.

So that was what the fellow was waiting for, thought Paul; he wanted something, like all the rest of them.

"A favour, François?—Yes, I grant it. Never mind to tell me what it is." It was some trifling request Paul was sure. He hardly heard the entreaty that continued at his side:

"If Monsieur le Comte would only permit François the honour to assist him——"

Paul shook his head; surprise caught his words away from him for the moment.

"No, nothing but play can save me now," he said presently, "and high play. But I have not even the gold to open my game high enough."

It relieved him to speak. He thought he should go mad if he did not speak; the sound of his trouble expressed was somehow less agonising than the secret cherishing of it, that was wearing its way to his very vitals. How must his financial difficulties affect him sooner or later in the esteem of men, such as the prince, for instance, among whom his social lines were cast? How long could it be kept from them, and from Vera? He groaned aloud.

The trembling François hesitated again, less from indecision than from fear of rebuff.

"If five thousand francs could help monsieur, merely to open his coup, it is his freely." Monsieur had not heard, apparently, and encouraged, François went on with his frightened plea: "With five thousand francs only, Monsieur le Comte has been said to make fortunes in the past."

Paul sprang to his feet, "You are offering to me your little savings, François? To me! Why?"

"But yes, Monsieur le Comte," said the old servitor simply. "Monsieur le Comte will repay me, in future. And after my sons are provided for, my daughters bien placees; my wife needs for nothing. Take it! For the sake of madame," he added urgently.

"I will! And I will win it back and a fortune with it!" said Paul, with a sudden decision. "It is money free from the curse of usury and sin; it will prosper. Rest assured.

God reward you, François!" He took the hand of the astonished butler in his own, and the tears dimmed the old grey eyes of François as he backed hastily from the room, overcome with emotion at being lifted to the sphere of confidant and assistant to his brilliant master. "Liberty, fraternity, equality," buzzed in his French ears with a new meaning, where they had been as empty watchwords so long.

The legends of Monte Carlo still hold the colour of the April night that followed. Paul de Hauteville sauntered idly into the rooms, and dropped a thousand franc note on the roulette table. His manner was studiously unostentatious, languidly indifferent, though he had vowed before the Delphic Sibyl that night that if he won it should be his last appearance at the gaming table for ever. As one does, to commit oneself in the righteous fervour of foolish vows, to prejudice events in one's favour, he had written out his oath and left it, a record of his decision, under lock and key, between the pages of his books of fate.

He was in evening dress, a white gardenia—Vera's flower—in his coat; no glint of gold or diamond to belie the quiet elegance of his individuality. His eyes were cold and his hands steady. The exhilaration of such desperate stakes steadied his nerves with a tension they had lacked of late. From the beginning he won, and from the moment of his first winning, no doubt of his rising star troubled him again.

He played on and on, till the bank was unable to compete with his phenomenally high and lucky play.

From the roulette tables he moved on to the Cercle, and seated himself quietly at baccarat. This was the thrill he had foresworn for ever! The love of the Goddess Chance he had vowed to betray in return for her sublime condescension to his necessity! Even the dealers were interested now, intent, curious. A man who breaks the bank at Monte Carlo is eternally marked. It is a feat as dazzling as it is difficult of attainment. Rapidly, silently, save for the mere vernacular of the game, the night wore on. One player after another left the table, until there was no adversary left, and the most unparalleled run of luck in the history of this most famous gambling resort was brought perforce to a close.

Paul had sat down to play, ruined and enslaved. He rose a free man and wealthy. He ordered his usual glass of cognac to combat his inward exhaustion, with a half-murmured: "To François!" over the brim, before he drank.

But even in his overpowering joy he was sobered to think of the narrow chance he had run, the abyss he had escaped from as by a miracle. His one distinct thought, his one recollection, through it all had been—Vera. He was conscious now, in the suppressed atmosphere of excitement that enveloped him, only of an overpowering fatigue that made him ill. He had outwitted Hélène; preserved his dignity with the Americans. François and chance had saved him, but he was tired unto death. He found himself gazing fixedly at his hands, with the tell-tale gambler's third finger, as tall as its neighbour, be-

traying his innate vice. He had sworn he would never play again. He did not regret the vow; he was only weary. He would go away now,—to America; he would travel, study, work, even in the abhorred American sense of business;—stamp out this curse from his life.

Again he was overcome with the sickening fatigue of his prolonged excitement.

“He has fainted!” cried Henri de Gaston in concern. But no, Paul opened his eyes slowly.

“I am hungry,” he said weakly. “Come, Henri. *Sa part est mangée.* Let us also go and eat a morsel of supper.” And rallying all his forces he left the Cercle with his friend, arm in arm, the valets and pages staring after them.

“To-morrow he will lose,” said the dealer with a shrug. “It is the rule, after such Devil’s luck as his to-night.”

Arthur Johnston, speechless and paralysed by the audacity of the “coup,” remembered the hour of the night at last, and followed the two men away, half staggering.

The days that followed were the last of the Riviera for the American trio. Already, in spirit, they were off for Paris, and lingered only to fulfil a few last engagements. Unconfessedly, on Arthur’s part, there was also the idea to bring Paul to some definite planning for the future. Eager as Alice and Mary were to seek a truer springtime and simpler scenes, Arthur delayed and held out against them.

“Leave all this, and come over with us,” he would

say to Paul, in constant appeal. "My uncles would put you in the way of a dozen lucrative deals at once."

"And leave my milieu?" Paul would ask dubiously.

"I suppose the life here *is* fascinating," said Arthur, "to a man born to it. But it will be here for ninety years more, to come back to! A change of interest now would prolong your years and save your nerves. We Americans are for ever being ordered off to Europe for jaded nerves; why should you not be packed off to America?"

"You forget I am a fatalist," said Paul. "Nothing prolongs life beyond one's appointed hour."

"Nonsense!" retorted Arthur.

For a time Paul continued to negative the whole suggestion, but as certain features of Monte Carlo under present circumstances grew increasingly alienating, he began after a while to regard the project as more plausible and attractive.

"After all, why not?" he admitted. "One would lose nothing by leaving everything here for a time. What more natural than that he and Vera should revisit the scenes of her infancy?" In spite of his last desperate run of luck his fortune was crippled; his star seemed on the wane. Curiously enough, his last great night of play had given him a horror of all risk, and he kept his vow untempted. Instead of a return of faith in himself, he found lack of spirit; and this of itself denoted shattered nerves and ebbing force. Arthur constantly advanced reasons for the sea voyage, till his enthusiasm became infectious.

Meanwhile Mary's impatience was visible to them all. The impervious devotion of her English lover aroused all sorts of feelings that were not consistent with the balance of her notions of right conduct. The situation, stationary, fretted her. She, too, hoped for a change of environment to restore her equilibrium, hoped or feared it, perhaps both, yet welcomed any change in the persistent struggle between her inclination and her loyalty.

Alas! when a woman is consciously loyal to a man, or a man to a woman, Love withdraws, mocking from his arbour, and bending his bow to aim again. Love is a spontaneous little sprite, who cares not a jot for the armour of the righteous, knowing a hole or two that will fit the pointed tip of his fleetest arrow.

The season was drawing swiftly to a close with a final round of gaiety in the villas, and not until the very eve of their departure did Arthur find an opportunity to exact one definite word from Paul. A small party were dining at the villa above the sea for the last time together, the von Wredens, of course, de Gaston, Wrenski, Lady Kintore and her nephew, with a few others, to meet the Americans. They had all been discussing or disclosing their summer plans. Lady Kintore was much aggrieved by the desertion of Colonel Lyndon-Carr, who announced himself off for England without warning or delay, when she had counted on his going with her to Florence for May. It did not soothe her disappointment to learn, incidentally, that Mary's aunt, who, they all were perfectly aware, had married a titled English-

man, possessed an estate almost adjoining the ancestral acres of her nephew's favourite uncle.

In vain she delivered herself of tirades against the dampness of the English weather in April; the channel fogs, the general screaming undesirability of a season there when every one was away who could get away; just as stubbornly did Colonel Lyndon-Carr adhere to his misguided programme. He had indeed arranged to consign his spirited old aunt to the tender mercies of a retired admiral and his lady, relentlessly about to do Florence for the seventeenth time.

"I must say, I have no objection to the admiral!" Lady Kintore was explaining, to all whom it might concern; "but his wife is a most tedious person. Really, I call her tiresome in the extreme! I dare say I shall not stop on long; but what is one to do? It is entirely too early to think of England."

"Oh, there's nothing like England, at any time of year, to eyes stuffed full of Africa," the colonel had remarked, in a noncommittal fashion.

"Even if his lungs are stuffed with Africa too!" Lady Kintore amended, loth to give up the fight.

"I say! it's a bit stiff to grudge a chap a sight of home after years away from it," said her nephew. "I can't chuck Africa till just the proper degree of temperature arrives in England, don't you know? It's now or never for a soldier of the Queen. God bless her! Wherever she is."

He looked very dashing and handsome as he sprang up and gave her ladyship a military salute. Alice fan-

ced she could see what hindered Mary from loyalty to far-away duty, bound to have grown colourless now in contrast with this handsome officer.

The von Wredens, who were going to their estates near Frankfort, grew fervent in their anticipations, to the relief of the Colonel. Wrenski had no plans, at least for discussion; nor had Henri de Gaston, more than those of the moth for the flame. Paul astounded everybody by his enthusiasm for Arthur's proposed American adventure. His attitude put Vera completely off her guard; there was no consistent parallel to it in her experience of him. But he had been so listless of late, and suffered such fits of depression, that she vividly reproached herself for the tardiness of her reconciliation with him, and would have thrown herself into any caprice that bade fair to rouse him, though America was the least luring of a thousand choices. Nevertheless, affairs were arranging themselves, it appeared, with or without her predisposition; and the party found themselves appointing to meet in Paris a fortnight later, with the idea of sailing from Cherbourg together.

Arthur's suggestion carried the day. They all loved the sea, and the heat would soon make Monte Carlo untenable. Why not? Paul allowed himself to be persuaded, and Vera, though puzzled, silently concurred, since it was his pleasure. The atmosphere of America, as she recalled it, seemed crude and unsympathetic enough for the experiment of regaining the old warmth between herself and Paul. Yet the scenes of their first passionate surrender to each other might bring a rush of

feeling more overwhelming than any that could be stirred by novel or unwonted associations, after all. It was a dreary concession, if the past held more of power to arouse him than their present.

She had scarcely discussed the matter with him, for the days intervening since their uniting talk upon the balcony had been crowded with distractions, and neither of them found opportunity for further confidence. Paul had suffered much from sleeplessness, and to save her the broken nights that were now uninterruptedly his own, he haunted the gardens, or threw himself down on the cushions in his dressing-room, when weariness at last overtook him after his nocturnal paces in the fragrant alées. His physical condition worried Vera increasingly, and it was with perturbed attention that she heard Arthur's parting words to Paul to-night, and noted the hearty handclasp, considerably prolonged, with one hand on Paul's shoulder in sheer good will and fellowship:

"In Paris then, the fifteenth? Is it a bargain? And I may secure your passage on our ship?"

To which Paul had replied: "But yes,—why not? It is inconceivably good of you to occupy yourself about it."

She noticed, too, that Paul touched Alice's hand with a sincerity of feeling that was probably surprising even to himself. It was as if he felt that he should be glad to meet her again, as indeed he was. She was to him a new, strong type, a revelation of womanhood. He was conscious of a restful sense of mastery, of reserved power, in her vicinity,

Von Wreden made characteristic adieux to Mary.

“So, kleinchen,” he was saying, “beware the Earl King’s white daughters in that evil Paris! They will offer to play ‘manche, lustige spiele’ with your bright eyes. Glück auf, und Behüt dich Gott! The Nussbaum will sing ever to me of thee, and of the secret it dreams for thee,—for another year. ‘Sie flüstern, sic flüstern—flüstern von Brautigam und nächstem Jahr.’” He hummed his beloved liedchen fondly to her, for the last time, while Frau von Wreden openly wept over them all.

Henri was pale. A little line of despair cut his brow, that only Vera understood. Love was for all, it seemed, save him; “next year” would hold for him no surcease of pain.

Colonel Lyndon-Carr took Mary out through the gardens to her motor.

“I am allowing you this appearance of orderly retreat,” was his final challenge. “But it is merely to change the base of operations, and the method of attack, and to give me time to bring up my new forces. We have had only a light skirmish yet, you know. I shall execute a flank movement and surprise you yet. I hope I should put up a stiffer fight for you than for a beggarly patch of veldt down yonder! I have never shown the white feather yet,—I am not awfully fond of white feathers, are you?”

What could Mary find to reply?

Only François, performing as usual his final revolutions, from garden gate to last glimmering candelabra,

surmised the import of things for his beloved master. Paul showed a stolid face enough as he bade the old servitor good-night, after his amiable fashion; but on his mind lay that thought of the stigma of trade, which should still further reduce his social position and acceptance, make it more than ever a matter of suffrance, or of indulgence, rather than his inheritance by right. Suddenly he spoke again, watching the old man complete his nightly functions.

“What do you say to it all, François? To go beyond the smile of la belle France, into exile. C’est dure, n’est-ce pas?”

“For Monsieur le Comte rest and diversion are become a necessity,” said François, unhesitatingly. “It is hard to leave France, beyond doubt, but it is not for a long time, not for ever. Only to make the return more quickly, restored in health and more happy than before.”

“But if anything were to happen,—my heart, par exemple, is not as usual,—the villa,—Madame le Comtesse, who will protect her interests here if anything happened?”

“C’est moi, Monsieur, myself, who will remain ever, to protect the interest of Monsieur, et Madame la Comtesse, whatever goes to arrive. Monsieur le Comte may rest assured, may depend ever upon the devotion absolutely fidèle, of François.”

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN THE CUCKOO CALLS AT NOONDAY

IT was with a double elation of heart and sense that the party set off on the crest of the morning. Arthur's reluctance to leave Monte Carlo gave way soon to the pleasures of anticipation, in view of Paul's decision to meet them all in Paris. Nor was Mary averse to the hinted encounter there with Colonel Lyndon-Carr. As for Alice, the sheer delight of the motor's flying speed, the intoxications of nature in its fairest mood along the way, would have been enough to set her pulses hurrying in sympathy, even had her face not been turned once more toward home and the children.

It was a madrigal of a morning! Gulls were circling in gleaming garlands over the sea; white sails scudding out in all directions. At the last moment Wrenski, despite their early start, had appeared with a bouquet as large as an umbrella, composed of lilac and wistaria, tube-roses and tangerine blooms, arranged as only a Russian dared. It made the whole atmosphere about them redolent, and half buried the recipient from sight. Paul had sent flowers to Alice in more conventional form but hardly less striking; frail orchids and jasmine set off by one perfect crimson rose.

In the blithest of spirits they saw for the last time the

bay of Villefranche, the scene of the battle of the flowers. A turn in the road shut it out, and the run to Paris began.

"Wrenski is about as impersonal and cheerful as a hearse, this morning," said Arthur; "I am glad to get off, myself."

"It wasn't his fault," said Alice. "Don't you know how even a pleasant dream seems distorted when you awake? I feel as if I had broken into the real day again!"

But Mary's face was buried in the blossoms of her bouquet, and she did not lift it. Wrenski had been a feature in her winter, this winter that was now passed for ever, though to him the season had been a season simply. Adieu, he had said, not au revoir. Would its lack of individuality be the same in other eyes as well? Mary speculated. Men were very strange creatures, she thought—so different from women.

But the cheerful working song of the motor hummed gaily in their ears, and Nice and Cannes were soon left behind in a golden haze. The glorious beauty of the Corniche d'Or beckoned before them. Far below them lay the sea, the vulture heart of Nature waiting for its prey, while above, on the steep mountain sides, even the distant shadows were turned to sunlight by the yellow ribbons of mimosa blooms. Through a wilderness of cliff and crag, where only cactus made its lair, the road lifted; dropping suddenly to breakers that tumbled and played upon the tawny sands, or turning sharply inland along the sides of some tranquil inlet where almond bloom still flushed over garden walls, and birch tassels

burst into yellow dust at the touch of the light breeze. Here, upon a ledge far out amid the fury of the waves, a palm stood in solitude; there the road rose again as the swallows fly, and cut a pine forest in half, the sea framed blue in the green branches and the mellow chanting of the firs sounding above the buzz of the car. There is no more brilliant bit of engineering in all France than this precipitous, curving, mad-cap bit of road along the untamed coast of the Mediterranean. Whether it cuts through sky-touching peaks of rock or descends to the sea level near some deserted château; whether the sea eats through the cliffs and must be bridged, or withdraws to dim islands, or invades worn grottoes that Byron would have invested with romantic castaways, audacious engineering was dared and executed to achieve it all.

Northward with the returning birds our travellers flew, at one with the mood and change of the fitful French weather. The constantly warning "Rallentir" had ceased to terrify them. The passion for speed, the forward road that swung its invitation before them in the glorious April shine and storm, led them from day to day of swift successive joy.

After the breathless run over the Corniche d'Or came Saint Raphael, with its dreaming beach and fringe of fishing craft. Through the narrow streets of Fréjus, they drove, literally, upstairs, while horses and children were hustled indoors, and mothers stood guard against the advancing motor monster. Beyond came the sombre Roman ruins on the lonely plains, and later Marseilles,

with its thrilling harbour, forest-masted, each in turn an entrancing experience, freshly new.

Avignon, with its cosy Inn, and the Roman wall surrounding the Papal palace, made them stop and draw a long breath once more. Even before they had crossed the river the long avenues leading off to hidden manor houses threw them into ecstasies. They rambled over the sacred precincts after luncheon, in mood to realise the import of the calm gallery of the conclave, with its line of receding doors, and saw, behind each one, in imagination, a Cardinal immured in prayer and meditation over the appointment of some forgotten Pope.

For them the garrison palace of to-day, resounding with the feet of soldiers, echoed too much of modernity. The Square haunted them longer, the charm of its fickle sunshine making it alternately the saddest and the most radiant spectacle they had seen in their wanderings.

Again the run to Lyons was all apple-bloom and sudden showers. The Loire tore along beside them, or crossed their road at intervals under a bridge so open that they seemed to skim the surface of the water.

Road and river were as if braided in one flowing strand, the river almost rivalling the motor's speed as it turned and dashed the spray from the flying mill wheels under the riotously growing roses. On they flew, the whirlwind of their car catching the blossoms from quince and cherry and apple orchards and swirling them after them in its wake, while the nodding branches made obeisance.

Between Lyons and Vichy the hills grew higher, and

were clad with wild flowers. Troops of blooming apple trees, like little bands of first communicants, in white robes and veils, were scattered in processions over the hillsides; lilacs, those deathless April lovers, showed purple and white beneath the cottage eaves. White cattle stood under snowy cider orchards up to their knees in acres of white daisies upon the hills of Auvergne. At other times their way led through miles of shadowing plane trees, faster and faster toward the bit of blue sky at the far end of the vista. Oh, the joy of that winey air and reeling road, with no unsophisticated Dobbins to climb a tree if the car did not slow to snail's pace for them! Only an occasional prejudiced mule stopped to kick a bit, on socialistic principles, before he jogged along again with his high cartload of green grass cut from the roadside. For the most part the warning toot of the horn cleared the smooth road with ease, and the automobilists' heaven was here, for good or bad alike. Vichy, with its hotels and casinos, was the last reminder of the Riviera world they had left behind them. The third day of their route, they stopped for déjeuner at Moulin, running abruptly through an entrance in a wall and coming suddenly out, or in, upon the Café Moret.

"My appetite is a whole consumer's league!" cried Arthur.

"And mine reminds me of what Bishop Brooks said once," groaned Mary. "He said if he ever lost his he hoped no poor man would find it!"

Alice meanwhile lost no time to interview the expectant waiter, who scented American largess and spun like a delirious top as he flung glasses and plates upon the

little table by the window. With one move he set chairs for them while he screamed to the chef surveying them approvingly from his pantry door:

“Potage—

“Entrecote—

“Pomme Sauté—

“Asperge—vite!”

A wine card was gripped in his teeth, and he pounded down a glass of superfluous toothpicks before Mary in special recognition.

“The cathedral and the ancient Château de Bourbon may be forgot, but that beefsteak and pomme sauté will live in my heart for ever!” Alice declared, when they finally sallied forth from their feast.

They made their way into the lively square, and found the car in the garage inebriating on gasoline. The camaraderie of the road declared itself there, shared by the owner of the sixty-horse-power Mercedes and the gamin who held the oil can and handed out the monkey wrench with a stoop and a squint entirely professional. He was no amateur, this gamin! He could talk automobile against the oldest expert there, and knew the technical lingo as well as the patrons in their bear-skin coats. “Elle marche!” he declared at length and with authority, and straightened his slender figure to watch their car as it backed out on another start.

It was not until just beyond La Charité that the first compulsory delay arose. They accepted it gladly, and wandered back into the old lichen-covered church whose

cloister was a dream in stone. Through the crumbling portal, up a dozen worn steps, they sauntered, delighting in the massive Gothic stone work, with the moss and wind-sown flowers that bloomed in its crevices.

Strolling about in this cloister yard, Mary showed her first inclination to remember the realities of their existence.

"Don't you think we are getting there a great deal too fast?" she sighed; "this will all be over so soon, and then——"

"Then something else just as wonderful, or a great deal more so, will happen to you," said Alice. "Trust life, Mary; it gives more than it takes away."

Was Alice thinking of Mary, or devising a philosophy for herself? She had carried with her to Monte Carlo the consciousness of a man's dependence upon her; a man other than her husband. She was bearing away now a clearer vision, a freer power. The heterogeneous misusage of love's faculties in that hotbed of emotion there had chastened her imagination, acted salutarily upon her reason. Marital vagabondage, even of vague desires, had become vulgar, hateful. One had only to see things in excess to feel revolt. Exceptions no longer exceptional lost their force of attractiveness. Her friendship with the grey-haired scientist in America had held no danger for either of them beyond that of straying fancy, an intensification of interest in life. They had but reached up to the little tendrils of that forbidden vine, with its forbidden fruit, so heady to the spirit, just tantalisingly within reach. True, there was a heightening of

capacity in each; a consciousness of those powers which Nature lays aside in atrophy and disuse if they are not employed. Reason assured Alice that she was quenching the springs of resource by losing him out of her life; that she could not afford to eliminate him without impoverishment. To him alone was she her completely possible self. Why should she not be herself then to the full? Yet instinct insisted that law was law,—life was life, man was man. Woman was all three, and a great deal of heaven and hell beside!

With the new knowledge born of the past winter, Alice felt that a stimulant toward duty itself, if sought outside the maritally strict proprieties, was in her case to take from Arthur the very strength which ought to have been his to give, the growth of which in him she could not otherwise enrich by all her effort. Her weakness had a part to play in the evolution of his strength, as of her own. Her own part in the recognition of Vera's charm over him she had accepted as a revelation of what silent suffering her platonic excursion might have cost her husband. She exorcised that fragment of her past for ever. Justly or unjustly, she saw, a married woman might not trifle with souls. Walter Pater's sentence came to her in argument: "For the way to perfection is through a series of disgusts."

"I never have been so glad in my whole life as I am to-day!" she exclaimed aloud, suddenly; "so glad to get away from all that feverish, distorted life and the haggard beauty of that coast. Life has never held such meaning or such joy for me as now. Never!"

"You are one of the sure people," objected Mary diffidently, with no real response in her face. "I envy them so! They always know how they feel, and what they are going to do. I wish I did——"

"You will some day," encouraged Alice.

"When?"

Alice laughed.

"That depends on yourself, I suppose. It's different in your case. A married woman has her children to fill her time, and her husband to occupy her heart. Thank God, there are those also to weep and struggle and hold out their hands to me. I don't have much time for speculation. I *have* to know what I want!"

"You are so convincing," protested Mary. "I feel so at the mercy of things."

"These little storms won't hurt you. They only twist you around a bit. It won't be long before you too will understand what a harbour marriage may be to a girl. You are only learning to trim your sails now, your pretty white sails, for steering in a big blow by and by."

They were pacing up and down in the grey cloister. The horn of the motor might recall them at any moment, but as yet only the twittering of the sparrows broke their solitude.

"I do really want to talk to you a little," began the girl gravely; "I am very, very unhappy——"

"When the motor stops, or all the time?" Alice's smile was slightly quizzical, and Mary admitted some mitigation.

"But whenever we stop," she said, "I find myself thinking again; it oppresses me dreadfully."

"I have a little that same sensation myself," said Alice ruefully; "as if I must just roam on, a part of elation, with no worry about citizenship, or morals, or doing-as-you-would-be-done-by!"

"I wish you would talk to me about marriage," said the younger woman again, with only apparent irrelevance. "Seriously, I am very much confused. I supposed I understood all about love, but so much that I was surest of seems beyond me now. I don't see land anywhere. How can I steer for a harbour, as you call it, if I don't even know where it is? I go round and round, I don't even know the direction I want to take!"

"Or the harbour you want to make?"

"Perhaps not even that."

"Does not the light-house flash to you?"

"Do you mean duty?"

"No. I meant love."

"Is not love synonymous with duty?"

"No. Not always," said Alice bravely.

"Don't you think it ought to be?"

"Ideally, it is; but that is a blessed happening."

"I never dreamed there could be so many kinds of love before," said the girl wearily; "at first I was completely dazzled by Comte de Hauteville and Vera; their kind seemed beyond any ideal I could ever have conceived of for myself. But afterward I saw that such passionate love, without any hope beyond its own satisfaction, could not last, was not what I wanted——"

Alice nodded quickly.

"It lacked consecration to a spiritual ideal, you mean, Mary? Something to carry it beyond the momentum of its own egoism?"

"Yes," agreed Mary slowly. "Only of course I did not define it as you do. But I have to admit that just mutual ideas, without Vera's and Paul's sort of passion, would not satisfy me either. I could not love only in spirit. Are you shocked?"

She left off, dismayed, thinking of Arthur and Alice, who had grown so dear to her. She forgot to go on again, preoccupied with her silent analysis of a relation that was so noble, she could see, and yet somehow so incomplete.

It was Alice who again elucidated the theory for her.

"No, I am not shocked. An exclusively spiritual or mental relationship in marriage is far from the ideal, as far from it as the spasmodic relations of those poor night moths and their lovers at the other end of the gamut. There may be a sort of rank sincerity about those too, while it lasts, the sincerity of an animal instinct. It may even last for ever, this world's for ever, that is. But it is to the truest love what blasphemy is to prayer."

Mary thought a while before she said, "Monsieur de Gaston told me once that Vera said ideal love was a cuckoo's nest. Do you believe it?"

"Believe what? That she said it, or he repeated it, or that it is true?" asked Alice gaily.

"All three."

"It may be, in Europe; but the American species of cuckoo lays her eggs in her own nest; good luck to her!"

"No, seriously," Mary insisted, "do you think any man's heart is ever safe from the invader, from the 'wandering voice,' as Vera says? Do you believe that at any time some strange, fascinating bird may come along and displace the faithful mate?"

"Words are easy like the wind,
Faithful mates are hard to find!"

misquoted Alice mischievously. She was observing that Mary talked more freely if her problems were touched upon lightly.

"Don't you believe any woman was ever first, last, and only in a man's heart?" asked the girl.

"Why, I thought we were talking about ornithology!" protested Alice.

"I wasn't," said Mary; "I was talking about myself. What right have I, for instance, to usurp the place of even a dead woman? The heart that is offered me, is it not her true nest, after all? Why isn't it treachery for me to take her mate? And yet if I were to consent to become engaged to, to—the other"—she faltered, colouring painfully, "might not he, such a man as he has proved himself to be, fall a prey to some such person as that Chauncy woman? Her spell would be one no mere girl would know how to undo until it was too late. How is a woman to defend her own heart any more than a bird her nest?"

She was nervous and agitated, and her tears were very near the surface. Alice put a protecting arm about her as they walked.

"You have never told me anything whatever about the man to whom you are engaged," she reminded her.

"I have often been tempted to, but it did not seem honourable while I was not irrevocably sure of marrying him," admitted Mary. "Can't you tell me what to do on general principles?"

"Only a little while ago I should have advised you differently, dear little girl. I should have counselled the call of the blood, and the reckless, spendthrift young love; but I have learned something out of my winter in that community of triflers; and now I say, that if in your heart you hold the faithful image of a man whose love is changeless and deep, who is bred as you have been, and has the ideals of an American gentleman, keep it there!"

Mary was silent, waiting.

"No one but yourself can estimate the real strength of your feeling for Lyndon-Carr," said Alice kindly; "it all depends on that, dear. Arthur and I can't help you there. Nobody can. Do you love him enough? That is the question. Love is the power that sets every other consideration aside."

"I know it. I am ashamed of it," Mary went on revealingly; "but when I am with him I have to let him see how I feel, in spite of myself. When I think of never seeing him again"—she drew a long discon-

solate sigh. "He fascinates me. I can't explain it, or defend it," she concluded.

"No true woman ever could, and no man either!" confirmed Alice heartily. "And the other, the lover in America, is it the same thing with him?"

"He is the constant man," admitted Mary, with a rueful smile; "there is no excuse for my roving."

They walked the length of the cloister in silence for a few times, and then Mary resumed, as if her thoughts had culminated in rebellion. "But he had loved before! He had married before. He can't blame me for hesitating to take what he had promised eternally to another woman; nor for loving a second time. It is only what he has done himself!"

Alice thought she understood how things were, but more by the light of experience than through the hasty words of the girl beside her. She gave her counsel in accordance.

"It may be painful to you now to associate your lover with a woman to whom he has been all things, even though the woman is now dead. But it is not dishonourable for you to take the life he has left to offer; not even though he have for you new and rarer gifts than he had for her in his unperfected manhood. It is the married man who knows how to love! How to cherish a woman, to appreciate, know, understand! Ah, Mary, Mary, if you do indeed hold the heart of such a man as I imagine, he is more worthy of your love than some untried boy, vacillating, perhaps, attracted here, yielding there, a gallant to more than one, his

fancy open to every random call of beauty. Better trust the serious love of a man who has loved and lost, and is gravely proud to love again, than the careless-hearted man who plays on the whole gamut of a woman's feelings. He may not overstep the formal rules of society, perhaps, but he's just as heedless whether he destroys life or blackens happiness."

She was talking to herself, she feared, more than to Mary, reminded as she had been of the sad, strong man whose friendship was so graven upon her memory. Her life might never admit its true response to him. Mary's lover seemed just such a loyal, vigorous creature, turning to her for a virtuous renewal of all that men hold dearest, and able still to afford her everything that her untried heart might crave. She added quietly, with intenser conviction:

"If you have found the 'constant man,' dear, a man who has loved only you and that other woman to whom he clung till death, think a thousand times before you give him up. Life is not too easy for women. A man older and wiser, to whom a woman can lift her eyes, who can inspire and guide, as well as love—Oh, Mary darling, think a million times!"

"I have," said Mary simply, her mind made up in advance, after the maddening manner of her sex.

They dropped a little apart, while Alice was thinking of what her life might have been, of the wealth wasting in the nature of that for ever distant, yet for ever near, man of her memories. Sometimes it seemed to her that everything was a hidden path to him. Albeit she

renounced him of her own free will her spirit laughed at barriers. Separation was as futile as the trackless sea to prevent her homing memory.

The honk of the horn recalled them imperatively.

"She marches!" cried Alice gleefully; "think again, Mary."

"I will, I intended to," said Mary Ingram, contradictorily. "I shall not decide until I see Colonel Lyndon-Carr again. I promised him that."

"Don't let him decide for you!" warned Alice. "Do your own thinking. It is a woman's commonest and worst married mistake not to. Don't begin that way, or you are lost."

There was no time for a word more. The car was visible through the crumbling arch, an incongruous tableau enough, with the speed set to make up lost time. The sight drove all Mary's dark clouds packing, even though the day had become a little chill and grey.

The moist fields and the atmosphere of recent rains, as they sped on again, suggested tears. The white-veiled trees, bending slightly, looked as if they were shrinking under the flying breeze. It was Cosne for the night, Cosne with its wide and leisurely-flowing river, lapping against the walls of the embowered houses on its banks, whispering beneath the vine-latticed windows or crooning to the poplars and willows on its brink. The motor, hunting through the sleeping town, with many appeals for right direction, poked its nose at last into the hotel of the Touring Club de France. They slept there that night in this little inn,

wedged into a crowded street where not an echo of that gliding water could murmur in their dreams.

The rest of their journey went by rapid leaps. Between Vichy and Fontainebleau numerous modern châteaux, de Busset and de Randan, and many less familiar, with their towers and turrets and stretches of sward and spring forest, bordered the highway. At every river or stream knelt red-cheeked washerwomen, indefatigably pounding and swashing their gay calicoes or gleaming muslins, turning only to stare a moment open-mouthed after the motor, or to wave a cheery greeting.

Our travellers only paused, however, to visit the old château of Madame Sévigné and stroll about the prim parterres of the garden. The formal urns and the gravel paths, the stately rooms within, they peopled with the wit and beauty of old France as they walked. It was noon of their last day. Fontainebleau was within reach for luncheon; they would sleep in Paris that night. Regret settled over them, and silence.

They ran into Fontenay beside its gentle river, followed the tiny village street a short distance, and then turned sharply northward to the banks of the stream. They drew presently near to the Château de Touvent, surrounded by a dainty beech grove just in its first faint leafing. All was going smoothly, when the chauffeur, with a gesture of French despair, suddenly threw up his hand.

"Cassé!" he cried, with finality, and brought the car to a standstill. Examination proved the accident not

serious, though slow to repair. Luncheon lay a few hours ahead. Their flasks were empty.

"Sapristi!" muttered the chauffeur, from the road underneath the car. "There will now follow two things encore; always three things must happen of misfortune."

At least luck had chosen a lovely spot in which to halt them. They were at the gates of the Château, with chapel towers on one side, where Gothic windows revealed transparent warriors haughtily-crested in the flickering sunlight. Stables and kennels were to be descried in the distant left; dogs were howling to be fed, and then were quiet as if satisfied. The forest ran down to the very edge of the river into a lush growth of starting reeds. The trees, scarcely in leaf, cast wraith-like shadows on the pale turf of the park spaces, as in pictures of the schools of Barbazon and Fontainebleau. It was indeed a landscape of temperament which they viewed, the high light of pale passions showing in it, spent desires that spring renewed, but could not satiate. The sun was dimmed a trifle, and only a restless breeze was stirring. In the distance a hungry hound bayed once or twice for his belated portion, then was appeased. All was as still as if one were in the heart of a lost forest. Evidently the château was at déjeuner; no one came or went. Only the river was in motion, bubbling past the slim white boat moored to the river bank, and the white road stretched tantalizingly away from the abode of the heart's desire in this leafy wood.

The sentiment of the spot cast its charm over the belated motorists one by one; their chat became more desultory, fell quite away. In spite of herself Alice's imagination would persist in placing here, amid the turnings of this shadowed river, the islands of the land where it was always afternoon. True to old habit, she associated her banished friendship with the beauty and emotion of such spots as this.

Suddenly, from the heart of the forest, while a cloud drifted over the sun like a faint warning, came the hail of the "wandering voice":

"Cuckoo!

"Cuckoo!

"Cuckoo!"

It was sadder than song; the spirit of a Greek myth vainly groping to life on Parnassus; restless, unassuaged. It came and went, a "wandering voice" indeed, Eros searching his own in vain.

The Americans had never heard it, and listened rapt. To them it was as if the forest heart had spoken. But the chauffeur crawled out from beneath the car with a startled expression, as he caught the plaintive echo, and cried:

"It is bad fortune when the cuckoo calls at noonday. Some evil will arrive!"

As he spoke there sounded from the grey chapel tower the twelve deliberate strokes of noon. The chauffeur shook his head fatefully.

"It is bad fortune," he repeated.

"We defy it!" cried Alice.

But the haunting, baneful echo of the cuckoo's note aroused a vague foreboding in her soul. Even the arrival at Fontainebleau, with its gay Hôtel de France, its flaunting scarlet awnings and splendour of red geraniums, could not entirely efface her melancholy.

CHAPTER XX

A BLEU FROM THE BARON

IT was Fontainebleau for tea instead of luncheon it appeared, and that briefly, if they intended to make Paris the same night. They ordered whatever could be most speedily served, and contented themselves with a cursory view of the famous hostlerie. The wonderful prints upon the walls, the captivating chambers glorified with their curtained beds, the pompous pillows on which the heads of kings and usurping emperors were boasted to have lain, with or without their proverbially heavy crowns, held them with the naïve wonder of those for whom the novelty of palaces was yet unworn.

“The two best qualities in a motorist are a gift of don't-care and a genuine love of surprise,” declared Arthur, as he settled himself finally to his belated and somewhat nondescript meal.

“Especially the ability to eat whether you are hungry or not. It may be your only chance that day!” said Alice, “unless you can imitate the camel a little as to provender.”

“If the people did not tell such lies about the distance,” suggested Mary.

“Yes, distance makes liars of us all,” said Arthur. “No man is a hero to his motor party. Men otherwise

perfectly reliable, fathers of families, holding positions of honour and trust, will tell you it is fifty kilometers to the next town, and they have made it in twenty minutes, whereas the guide book you have lost or left behind has always known it was a hundred and fifty. Distance and speed become a mania. The joy of arriving is second only to the craze for departing!"

"Well, I hope we shall break down soon again," said Mary longingly. "It is the only real chance we get to see the beauty we have crossed the ocean for. We can motor for speed anywhere just as well."

"We ought to be off this instant, if we are going on to-night at all," warned Alice; but Arthur was minded to have a glimpse of the palace, and could not be dissuaded.

"I want to see the cradle of the great Napoleon, if they shut me in there all night," he insisted.

Already the doors of the palace were being closed, and lingering sightseers were reluctantly emerging in twos and threes, but a short argument with the guard won him entrance and he disappeared within. The others waited for him in the motor, somewhat impatiently, for the day was waning fast, and Paris still lay far ahead. The weather had changed again, April-wise, and a greyness was closing over them, threatening black roads through the forest.

"There he is now!" cried Alice presently, and beckoned him to hurry.

"You can't be sure at this distance, and with his back turned," dissented Mary. Alice had seen Arthur

come from the palace entrance, but did not note that Mary's glance was in another quarter. She continued to beckon, and Mary repeated:

"His back was all you saw, what made you think so?"

"Think so? Why you have only to look at him!" she said, for Arthur was half way across the courtyard, stopping a moment to get the effect of the façade a last time.

She glanced at Mary as she spoke, and a smile stole over her face, as she caught the direction of the girl's look, and discovered the cross-purposes at which they had been speaking. Her eyes were not upon Arthur, but upon the balcony of the Hôtel de France, which they had just left, where a palpitating motor car was disgorging a load of English tourists. Conspicuous among them, though presenting only his back for their recognition, was a figure undeniably resembling Colonel Lyndon-Carr, doing the honours to the ladies with a characteristic gallantry of voice and attitude. He turned, and immediately Mary's eyes ricocheted. Both women hoped Arthur would not insist on recognition, that the chance encounter would go unobserved. Neither of them could have explained why. A lurking feeling of having spied on him, although in reality he had but overtaken them, was in Alice's mind. If he wanted Mary as badly as he had professed, his ability to be happy with "t'other dear charmer" was unfortunately too evident. And Mary, whether the stalwart host in the distance was actually he or not, was jealous;

smitten suddenly by the effect of his absorbed companionship in those other women, women of whom she knew nothing, and failed to recognise as any of the social flotsam of the recent season.

She made no sign, and Alice spoke no word, in subtle comprehension of her desire to get off unhailed. Fortunately Arthur was absorbed by the interior of the palace, over which he waxed eloquent, as the motor got under way and sped through the sunset fields into the grey cloud-banks toward the north. But the episode had been enlightening to Alice. Jealousy is one woman's unflinching test of another woman's sub-conscious devotion to a man.

They were still on the edge of the forest, with the first shadows deepening around them, when the fatal "third thing," duly prophesied by the superstition of the chauffeur, overtook them.

It was luckily only a broken tire this time, and they resigned themselves in content for the sake of the place and the hour. It was indeed a place to hold in memory. Through the budding branches in the yet fading west the shining thread of the April crescent moon was low on the horizon. They alighted for a rest, and followed the wood paths into the denser growth. Little furry wild things scuttled away from them in the dusk; a bright-eyed ground-bird nestling her young started up at their footfall. The cry of some brooding bird fell down to them through the leafy hush of the high branches. Far on some unseen hilltop the golden notes of a belated hunter's horn aroused the echoes, answered

by the rich baying of hounds in harmonious intervals. It was night in the forest. The great heart of Nature rested from her labours. Only the beating of wings from the thick darkness of her coverts made her utter repose more conscious, as if she were smiling in her sleep.

When they returned to the highway the headlight was gleaming, and the man already at his wheel again.

"Pardon, Monsieur et Dames," he said, bowing, "there has passed also another car from Nice for Paris. One demanded if we had need of the assistance, but I made the reply that all goes well. It was a Daimler, fifty-horse power. The name of the proprietor I have lost, but the gentleman in the tonneau with the ladies was that Englishman well known to Monsieur; gentil, élégant; officier, je crois. One called him always Monsieur le Colonel. Mais mon dieu! C'est vraiment une partie de plaisir!" he added innocently in French, with a knowing shrug, "and going at the third speed, comme le diable."

Arthur and Alice exchanged significant glances. Mary busied herself with a sandwich and affected not to hear, until Arthur broke in upon her.

"There once was a Colonel, L-Carr"—

he hummed;

"Whose wagon was hitched to a star!
But he made haste so fast
That his girl he ran past!
Did this up-to-date young Lochinvar!"

It was her supposedly love-lorn adorer then, that she had seen on the balcony of the inn at Fontainebleau, making merry behind her back; absorbing consolation at every pore, probably forgetful of his need of consolation at all.

Seeing her ruffled dislike of the situation, Arthur hastened to say lightly:

"In these degenerate days you can't expect a man to mope long, Mistress Mary. There is always some one to lure him on to his undoing. You wouldn't respect him if he did not live up to the man's standard:

'Shall I, wasting of despair,
Die because a woman's fair?'"

"Oh, I say! Now you are chaffing!" cried Mary, recovering her spirits with a good imitation of Lyndon-Carr's best British manner. Yet the belief that he could want to take that trip with other women, and share all the beauty and romance of it with them, just then, rankled. If she had thought of him at all along his way to Paris it was not to delude herself into believing it had been one of silent meditation and communion. The laughter of the group on the balcony of the Hôtel de France, was, as she recalled it, of a rather boisterous gaiety. It occurred to her that the forces Colonel Lyndon-Carr was bringing up to flank her, were too invariably feminine; his bombardments against her heart were calculated not wisely but too well.

It was ten o'clock when a dull glare appeared in the

northern sky and made the party in the motor cry out over what they supposed was an aurora borealis. The tired chauffeur, however, gave one comprehensive, dramatic word, accompanied by his lifted hand, as if in salute:

“Paris!”

It was midnight when they ran into the courtyard of their hotel through the night streets of Paris. The panorama of the Rue de Rivoli and the Place de la Concorde made day dull by comparison. How the city glittered after the hallowed darkness of the forest and the lonely road. How the shimmering crowds and gas-light mocked the recent solemnity of Nature!

To watch the people flying under the horses' very noses to places of refuge between eddying cabs and cars; to catch the chance voices of strangers crossing and recrossing where the press was thickest; to be deafened by the roar of life again; to feel the blood rise scarlet under that stimulant stronger than poison, the draught of human passions; to drown in one's own imaginings of the hinted things that made the city's night—this was not Paris alone, it was human life.

The cheer of their bright apartments after the chance houses of the road made their welcome positively friendly. Fires were soon lit on their hearths, and something to eat and drink was spread before them. The waiter disappeared before they remembered with regret that it was Saturday night, or Sunday morning, so that their mail had gone to the bank and was not accessible till Monday. To their surprise, however, the

waiter returned presently bringing a single telegram on his tray.

"Un bleu pour Monsieur," he explained briefly, and retired. Arthur tore the missive open, but the letters danced so unmercifully before his eyes, after the first comprehending glance, that he could with difficulty make sense of them.

"What is it? The children?" Alice begged with dry lips, seeing his face.

"It is signed von Wreden," he answered, still staring at the telegram. "I don't know what it means," he added blankly, looking from one to the other.

Alice took the bit of blue paper from his outstretched hand. Mary's went to her heart with a convulsive pressure. The Baron meant Monte Carlo, and Europe, not America, could deal her a vital wound; but she made no sound as Alice read the message out to them. It was unpunctuated and lacked capitals after the manner of telegrams:

"Return soon as possible. Accident. Madame de Hauteville has need of assistance. von Wreden."

Vainly they read and reread the words. "Vera in trouble," cried Alice. "But how strange the message should come from Baron von Wreden!"

Arthur said nothing, but head and heart misgave him.

With her first long breath of relief Mary picked up the telegram again, and read it in deepest sympathy.

"Something dreadful has happened," she said, laying it down helplessly, "perhaps an accident to Count de Hauteville. It says 'accident ici.' Vera would not

need any of us if it had not been something in which Paul was powerless to help her——”

Alice thought instantly of the financial transactions of the recent weeks. Was it money the de Hautevilles needed? Perhaps they had turned to Arthur again in some extremity. Paul would never have stooped to such a ruse. Vera had instigated the telegram, relying on her power to bring Arthur back again to her side, on some caprice; von Wreden had merely been the cat's-paw. All Alice's old antipathy to the cold, self-centred woman, with her strong, unheeding spell over men, rushed over her again as she noted her husband's inward excitement at the summons. Bitterly she saw the result of her years of effort for him "belong to the woman who did not know,—and never could understand." Mary frankly exposed her own conjectures; Alice held hers in reserve; while Arthur, caring less for the reason than for the fact that Vera needed him, paced up and down the room in anxious indecision—or was it indecision?

His first words proved it was not.

"It is after midnight now. The *côte d'azur* leaves at nine to-morrow morning," he calculated, drawing out his watch.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mary. Arthur looked at Alice, but she did not speak, though he waited a moment for her customary inspiration.

"I am going back to Monte Carlo by the first train," he said definitely. Mary in turn sought Alice's face with a glance of interrogation.

"Alice will do as she prefers," Arthur continued, noting and answering. "I shall hope to be back soon. It may not be so serious as we fear; in any case my presence seems imperative, or von Wreden would not have sent for me. Vera has no living being who could come to her, in a crisis—von Wreden knows that. He is devoted to her, but he knows no one could be to her what I am."

Alice's expression remained guardedly neutral. Would he never stop betraying himself in this madness to be gone?

"I am nearer to her than any one. My aunt would expect it of me." His voice rang with a new timbre, a resolution Alice had never heard in it before. It struck a vibrant note and held firm. There was no questioning, no appeal to her deciding opinion. He was his own now, to will and to act.

"I will do whatever you say," she heard herself acquiescing flatly. "Of course there is Mary to be considered here, and probably I should only be in the way at the end of the journey if I went. It is a long one too."

It was so novel to find Arthur acting without her coöperation, generating his motive power, that she found no precedent to guide her.

"I think the long journey would be hard on you tomorrow, and practically you would only delay my return," he announced positively. "I will arrange everything for you here. The hotel people know you; you and Mary can rest and amuse yourselves until I am

back again. A man would only be in the way in your shopping raids."

The thought of not responding to the Baron's summons seemed never to have occurred to him, Alice saw. It was Arthur who planned, foresaw, took the initiative now, and at whose instigation? Whose, if not the selfish, unresponsive woman that had somehow waked in him those fires of manhood and sacrifice which her own redundant wisdom had not lighted yet.

The bright ten days of Paris they had counted on together, the last of their foreign holiday before the "magic skin" shrank quite away and their wishes had no further power, began to vanish. All their plans and anticipations were now to be swept aside without compunction. The blind message from Monte Carlo recalled him with but its hint of evil, obliterating every other vision from his sight. Vera had but to sound his name, and all the other voices of the world were mute. By sheer force of habit, habit that had hardened into character by constant repetition, conquering bitterness and amazement, she nerved herself to enter heartily into his undertaking. She forgot her fatigue in preparing his bags for the early start, and arranging matters as much as possible for him. She would not excuse herself from overseeing the slightest trifling detail of his wardrobe. No provision was overlooked. Only once did her anxiety betray her.

"I wish you would wait to get our letters before you start," she reiterated. She had always a curious presentiment about letters from home, a shadow of appre-

hension that almost outweighed the joy of their coming.

"There is nothing at home to cause the least apprehension," he reminded her. "I should have to wait until Monday, for that, and lose two days by it. Time may be too important to waste. I would not risk it."

"But if there should be bad news?" persisted Alice.

"You are as bad as the chauffeur, with your trouble coming because a bird sang out of tune!" he scoffed. "The cuckoo can't possibly know what is going on in the United States! He is only informed of European affairs. You will find, in the 'Matin' to-morrow, some royalty has had a duel or a Saxon Princess eloped. It won't be any calamity nearer than that."

Alice did not look convinced. The shadow scarcely lifted, as she folded his scarfs in their satchet case without attending to his nonsense.

"If anything should come up to worry you," he said, influenced in spite of himself by her quiet, "wire me as soon as Cook is open Monday and you have read your mail. But there won't be anything. How could there be?" He had the easy optimism of a man whose real anxiety is bestowed in another quarter. It seemed to him so unreasonable in Alice to be fretting about remote contingencies, when Vera was in actual trouble. It was not like Alice, either; it was more like other women. He admitted her, magnanimously, to have been exempt thus far from obtrusive feminine nerves and unreasonable irregularities. He had often thanked the stars she had not a nerve in her body! Of course

it was disappointing to miss her good time in Paris. She was tired to-night too. But she would be herself again to-morrow, and apologise for thinking of herself when Vera was in trouble. A good night's rest would set her straight. But Vera—poor Vera! Perhaps to-morrow would be no brighter for her! She had such a tragic capacity for suffering. Ah, she knew how to love!—He shut his heart to this musing, but it went through his head incessantly, and next to the man who had the power to cause her suffering came the man she could lean upon for support and consolation. Alice was self-reliant always, resourceful and courageous. Little Vera, with her proud, white face, had none of Alice's ability to take care of herself and everybody else beside! She was a woman turning to some man for everything; for her happiness, love, life. It was an appealing picture he made for himself before he finally slept, unconscious of his gratification in this necessity that had arisen, or of any least disloyalty to Alice in his wakeful eagerness to be on his way toward her whose adoration had been the first sentiment of his manhood. By imperceptible stages she slipped from his fancy into his dreams. For Alice the night passed without sleep.

"I am sorry to leave you, dear," he said, as he kissed her hastily next morning in good-bye. "It is too bad to have spoiled your morning nap. Be good to yourself, and wire me a word after you get the American mail on Monday. I will leave the first minute I have done what they sent for me to do. Have a good time! Say good-bye to Mary for me, won't you?"

He looked in the glass and stepped back to perfect the knot of his scarf. When the door was all but closed, he came back into the room. She heard the click of the elevator as its attendant waited impatiently outside.

"I hope you understand exactly how I am placed by all this, dear," he said with a bit of deprecation. "I somehow feel a little lack of sympathy that is unusual from you——"

"No, not at all; I do feel your position. I sympathise with it fully," she avowed, with her brightest smile. "Mary and I have agreed we are quite equal to taking care of ourselves, and it won't seem very long; for after all, it won't be very long. And there is always the *Bon Marché!*"

"I wish I did not feel that you disapproved my going," he repeated.

"You can't do anything else, Arthur. It is unavoidable. Now do go, or you will miss your fast train and spoil everything."

"Well, it's a relief to feel you will be enjoying yourself! I'm glad you have come round to see it as I do. It makes it much easier for me to go. Good-bye! You won't forget to re-mail my letters care of de Hauteville, will you?"

He kissed her again stoutly, but without sentiment, and was gone.

By some strange avatar they seemed to have changed natures in the alembic of life through which their fates had been subjected to pass.

CHAPTER XXI

LOVE'S LAST RENDEZVOUS

ARTHUR had been hours gone when Alice and Mary finally roused themselves to the responsibility of a Sunday in Paris, with no man to represent them.

They had a late déjeuner in their rooms and then took a cab and drove over the Seine to St. Etienne du Mont, past the gardens of the Luxembourg, where the bands were playing melodiously and the fountains leapt in the soft air. It was April weather still; luring sunshine and deceptive shower interchangeably. They amused themselves by smiling at the strangers who stared as they themselves had known how to stare a few months ago. The Champs Elysées was crowded with Balzac's people playing their eternal human comedy. They imagined it was the Duchesse de Langeais who passed upon the left, turning all heads. Here was Coppée's villain, going to sit by his old mother on the sly. There a worried face concealed the loss of the pearl necklace Maupassant has immortalised. Hugo's friends, especially the "gamin," elbowed each other there. Alfred de Musset's heroes smiled in passing. They knew them all, and equipped each with an appropriate romance from French fiction; mingling with the Sunday mob as

if France were their own and her past their glory. A smart shower caught them just as they were encircling Notre Dame, where the horse-chestnuts were in feathery bloom, lifting their white plumes about the flying buttress at the rear of the cathedral, and pleasuring swarms of bees with their fragrant fare.

Paris in spring-time when the horse-chestnuts are in bloom,—say it to one of her lovers and watch the light that answers in the dullest eyes. Paris in spring-time! It is charm to the stranger, poetry to the poet, “*eau de vie*” to the Parisian.

Dismissing their cab, Mary and Alice entered the cathedral, with the hurrying crowd, and lost themselves in the gloom of the nave lit only by the twinkling candles of the far altars. The music of the organ crept out like little tongues of flame, increasing to a leaping blaze of glory until it wrapped them in its power, a searching fire to burn and prove. As they looked about for a place, adapting their eyes to the dim light after the April greyness outside, they became aware of an air of expectation pervading all the worshippers. The organ music rose still higher in its triumphing, and up the side aisle passed rapidly four servants of the morgue, bearing upon their shoulders the pine box coffin of some nameless, friendless outcast, brought to God's altar for love at last, since no other would claim it.

Before they had rallied from this grim spectacle another box followed, and yet another, until seven of these stark burdens lay at the foot of the altar awaiting from death the blessing that life had not bestowed. Alice

turned to a woman who had dropped on her knees beside her and was praying audibly.

"What is it?" she asked. "What does it mean?"

"The victims of the Seine, madame," was the unhesitating reply. "It is the hunger, or the love, that drives them there at last. It is the same thing." Her fingers still ran through her beads as she whispered in French always. "It is of love the last rendezvous, you understand." And again her lips moved mechanically with intercession for the dead.

Over these poor suicides the Mother Church offered her noblest prayers and most seraphic music. Here at last was victory, not defeat. The lost were found, and the divine mercy and honour due the human soul, however life and society may have maimed it, was given them. It was to Alice a thrilling thought. Overwhelming, inconsecutive impressions surged over her as she sat there lost in her own emotions, her own reconciliations. When the forces of love broke from their determined courses, it seemed to her, the gathering flood might put out the very stars in heaven, and let original chaos loose. So loosed they led to this; chaos, convulsion, and in the soul despair and death. Control rose to her as the only saving hope of life. Involuntarily her mind, reeling, steadied itself on the recollection of that grave, self-disciplining friend she had known across the sea. The love of such men did not make havoc of creation. The summing up of her confidence in him came in the lines she loved:

"I steadier step when I recall
That when I slip, Thou dost not fall"

It was the only prayer that came to her lips, as the people about her threw themselves upon their knees in their complete abandon of petition. His comprehension of this ghastly service would have been revealing and interpretive. The music that rang overhead in its story and assurance of the almighty power to forgive, brought his presence to her as all her great experiences invariably did. In accord with hers, his nature soared with inspiration, or clove the buried truth of life, as if in some former existence they had been so united that soul had no other care but to mirror soul for ever. When the high, transfiguring notes of the benediction called her to contemplation of the Most High, she suddenly shrank back. Trembling, she realised that in the sight of perfection, even her straying thought of him was in itself a dereliction, of baser import even than the offence of those pitiful sodden sinners in their seven wooden coffins.

At last, as swiftly as the procession had entered, it withdrew from the church. The little moment of supremacy was over. The soul and death had again had their transitory honours. The body would be disposed of with as little dignity as that of which its tenant had deemed it worthy.

A straggling, sordid knot of the curious followed out, meshed in the changeless mystery of dissolution. The other worshippers left the church or moved from one religious performance to another, but Alice and Mary

Ingram lingered behind them. They stood and looked with wonder up into the dome; passed behind the high altar, where countless confessionals invited; stopped before many of the side chapels and shrines, half for the paintings but more for the sake of the human faces imploring aid, or, perhaps, returning thanks, or merely offering jaunty prayers with roving eyes and a promise of a hundred days' immunity. Everywhere the spring flowers were visible, tied in bouquets with lavish ribbons, or dropped by young hands frightened at their own audacity in attempting to placate the Saints.

They strayed a little apart at last, Alice standing under the great crucifix at the extreme eastern end of the interior, letting her gaze wander through the distance of the nave, beyond the choir, through the forest of arches that seemed to lose themselves in space. She had been deeply stirred. Many entities had presented themselves to her for consideration in new lights since she had first set her foot on foreign soil. Old conclusions, equal to the demands made of them at home, here called loudly for revision. She wanted to be alone, to think her way out. . . .

At first she did not notice that a voice speaking at her side addressed itself to her; then coming back from her trance-like contemplation, within and without, withdrawing her gaze from the incense-clouded arches, she heard again the insistent words:

“Madame—J'ai faim!”

She looked at the pale creature who had followed her and spoken. His dress was that of a gentleman, but

his eyes had the glare of a hungry animal. Before she could open her purse, he had come closer, and spoke again imploringly, as one lost:

“J’ai faim d’amour!”

She turned and walked rapidly away. Could one never in all France get rid of that vampire “l’amour?” She recalled the oblique glance of the woman at the Villa Réséda; the face of the girl suicide at Nice; the huddled figure of the little jockey on the shutter, whose tears for a faithless mistress had fatally handicapped his race. The expression of Henri de Gaston when he spoke to her of Mary smote her memory;—a thousand and one phases of the miserable, ill-regulated passion always in evidence here. It sickened her. As she made her way toward the door, she saw Mary disappear through the heavy curtain; searching for her, undoubtedly. Resolved that no such a hideous shock should come to the child through lack of her protection, she followed swiftly. She gained the friendly daylight and saw upon the church steps directly before her a well-known figure; a man looking out over the open square and down the river with a pleased air of familiarity with the place and the hour: a man her own guilty sub-consciousness, but a few moments since, had conjured out of space, the man she most and least would have wished to meet!

Mary was approaching him as she drew near to the edge of the steps to see if the rain permitted or forbade departure.

He was here! For a flash she was glad, and knew

she was glad. Everything else around and within disappeared, leaving only the fact of his presence to account for the revolution of the earth.

He turned, then, and met Mary face to face, and suddenly Alice saw him take the girl's agitated hands in both his own, and bend over them as reverently as a saint before a shrine,—or as passionately as an older man before a younger love!

"Sweet!" she heard him say. No other word escaped him. For all three, perhaps, destiny had appointed this as love's last rendezvous.

What immediately followed devolved wholly upon Alice, for Mary was too confused and inadequate to solve the situation.

"To think of Mary's wonderful, nameless friend being you!" he had cried to Alice. "This heartless child has written me no one word, until in despair I got her father's permission to set off on my travels and find her myself. I might easily have missed her, for she has only hinted at her general line of flight, with the nameless you."

Alice made no explanations. There seemed none to be made. Possibly no one would have heard them; they were all so submerged in the sympathy of their confusion.

It was impossible at this late hour to include him in their evening engagements, for they were to dine with Mary's aunt, who had come over from England and was stopping with friends. Alice felt sorry for his disappointment, but to Mary it seemed to come in the

nature of a respite. Meanwhile, they drove back to the hotel together and performed the function of tea with that external fitness which makes convention so often a first aid to the injured.

When he had taken his genial leave of them until the next morning, Mary went to her room to dress for dinner, and, for the first time since Alice's acquaintance with her, locked her door behind her. The remarks she offered on the events of the afternoon were, for the most part, impersonal. Only one lurking astonishment found its way to utterance.

"It does seem so strange that you and he knew each other all the time, and you never told me!"

To this manifest injustice Alice replied, "How was I to know you had ever met him?"

And then they laughed over the absurdity of the thing.

If Mary knew that Colonel Lyndon-Carr was to be among the guests at dinner that night, Alice had no way of telling, but it was a very beautiful Mary, with a wonderfully awakened light in her eyes, who did sit down between their French host and the impetuous Englishman. Lyndon-Carr could not keep his heart cool as the menu diverted the passing hours.

Mary's aunt, meantime, was smiling unobservant, yet with an air of satisfaction not hard to construe. At first Mary herself found it impossible to throw off the disconcerting remembrance of the afternoon, with what it portended for the morrow; or the ungrateful vision of her present adorèr amid that gay pleasure party at

Fontainebleau the day before. Her mood told against her when he rallied her on her unusual silences.

"Whatever has put you in such a quiet, little girl?" he asked, sotto voce, when topic after topic had fallen flat between them. "What have you been doing with yourself? How is the garrison holding out? Have you been laying in stores? Provisioned freshly for siege, eh?"

"I went to church this afternoon,—nothing else, especially," she answered tamely.

"Better steer clear of church on the continent," he resumed. "They smell so awfully, don't they? And they are really the resort of the lowest beggars. One comes in contact with such an impossible class."

"Don't you go to church yourself?"

"Oh, I'm by way of being a churchman at home; every decent chap is, you know. I go to church when it comes my way. I rather like to hear the prayers and collect for the day, and read over the inscriptions on the tombs of my ancestors. There are a jolly lot of them, too. You'll see them for yourself when you are down at Lady Mary's place; it's near my aunt's, you know."

"Perhaps I shall not go down with her. I may not be able to go, after all," said Mary.

The man's face fell.

"What's up?" he asked confidentially. "You have not had a row with any one, have you? I shall be cut up the worst way if you give us all the slip. My uncle

is keen about meeting you, too. He can't believe I have been bowled out at last, at my age!"

"Neither can I," said Mary, raising her troubled eyes, and giving him the benefit of their serene depths.

"Try me!" he urged. "Set me a test. I would win out before the whole world."

"I wonder if you would," she mused. "I think you would win in a brilliant dash, but not in a long run. I don't know about your endurance. I don't believe you would care long enough to be unhappy about any girl."

"You ought to have seen me after you left Monte Carlo," began Lyndon-Carr.

"I did," Mary interrupted him quietly.

"Oh, I say! where?" he cried in astonishment.

"On the road from there to Paris."

His face clouded a trifle.

"I could not stand it with Lady Kintore. I went over to Nice and fell in with a party coming along; so I came along too. They wanted me to awfully. I only wanted to kill time till I met you again."

"When one kills time one generally kills other things, too, don't you think?"

"If you mean I'm a fair shot, I will admit I usually make my bag."

"And failing a gun," Mary suggested, "you do a little lady-killing meanwhile."

She was showing more spirit than she had ever shown to him before. Lyndon-Carr threw up his handsome

blond head with a perceptible increase of haughtiness about his lips, full lips that were always a trifle too suggestive of self-complacency, a trifle too contemptuous of others, to be quite kind.

"Yes, it was a good run from start to finish," he said, ignoring the question between them. "Lady Mirabel is one of the gamiest women I know. She keeps things going, I can tell you! You ought to see her hunt. She can steer a motor as well as any chauffeur. She has got her license, too, and drives in Hyde Park whenever the whim takes her. Everybody stares, but then if she had minded being stared at, with good looks like hers, she would have died young, poor girl!"

His tactics were successful enough. In fancy Mary already saw rows of accomplished women waiting to amuse this welcome wanderer on his return to his own country. Her mounting jealousy upset diplomacy. She saw him on the point of being swept away from her for ever, and her next move betrayed her feeling in the situation.

"I don't see that it matters whether I come down with Aunt Mary or not," she began. "You will have plenty of prettier women to amuse you," she went on half in earnest. Then something happened so entirely unforeseen that she saw the room through a strange, blurry haze, and felt her heart stop beating and the blood fly to her head; for the hand that lay in her lap was imprisoned by his as he made a skilful feint to speak to Lady Mary around the towering mass of floral decoration that cut him from her view,

"Oh, please——" implored Mary, in an anguish of shyness lest some one should see.

"Never!" he declared firmly, in an aside to Mary, but continuing his conversation with her aunt. Although the signal for rising was actually being given, still he held her hand. Speechless, Mary lifted her eyes to his, and what she saw must have been convincing, for she ceased to struggle as he whispered:

"If it is mine, I will allow you the temporary use of it, otherwise I keep my prisoner. Surrender?"

"No."

"You admit it is my prisoner, don't you?"

"I am desperately afraid it is," she assented, just as the other guests arose, and with hardly time to prevent a public esclandre. "It was a stolen march, though," she whispered reproachfully as the ladies withdrew.

"Not at all. It was a 'coup' long premeditated and carried out in cool blood," he retorted.

After dinner when the men returned to the drawing-room he went immediately to Alice.

"I want to enlist the American forces on my side," he explained. "I am ready to call out all my reserves, and I awfully want you at the head of my column, carrying my colours."

"It seems rather in defiance of traditions for British and Yankee to league together," remarked Alice; "especially against a fellow countryman."

"Oh, come along! We are all of the same blood now; cousins, and all that sort of thing, whenever there's a

speech to be made or a treaty to be signed. You *will* fight for me, won't you?"

Somehow his youth and frankness proved compelling with Alice, too, and before he left her, but without really meaning to do so, she had committed herself to his standards unreservedly.

"But I don't believe you will need allies," she assured him, with intentional encouragement, at the end of their chat. "You strike me as altogether capable of managing your own campaign; and after all the opposing force is only a little girl with a heart of gold."

It occurred to her that the possibilities of Mary's jealousy were only too well known to him if he must resort to strategy for his victory.

Not a word as to the hopes of either suitor passed between the two women that night, and morning brought a sudden shattering of all leisurely drifting and gave no further opportunity. On Alice's part, too, it called for decisive action in another quarter.

A cable was handed her as they were going out next day with some imperative shopping in mind. It was one of those pitiless messages of which economy in words make sharper the bitter point. It was dated from her mother's house in America; day, month and year following; punctilious but unheeded. She knew its contents instinctively before she read:

"Arthur typhoid comfortable Doctor advises come."

Her boy ill? Come? She could not come fast enough. Mary could hardly keep pace with her as she ran downstairs. She fled past the astonished lad in the

"ascenseur" who held the door open for her in vain, and passed the concierge without seeing him, unheeding of his solicitous figure in her path. Once in the street, she stepped into the first empty cab.

"Cook's. Vite!" was all she said.

The letters received only an hour before had all been so blissfully reassuring! She had been vexed with herself for her own foolish alarms. She had newly fortified herself in her resolutions for happiness, even in her husband's absence, quickened to a more natural sympathy for Vera in the circumstances that might be destroying her peace. And now,—now it had come. She had been taken unaware after all her foreboding.

Not till everything was all done, all that could be done—cable sent, telegram to Arthur at Monte Carlo, money arranged, all the vain details that must be managed in such a crisis and often save one's reason, was she ready to face Mary's problems again. Poor Mary, whose heart was broken in sympathy with her friend, in utter forgetfulness of herself.

"What will you do, dear child?" she asked Mary.

"I can go right to Aunt Mary. Don't think of me, please."

"Which one of them are you engaged to?" asked Alice bluntly; all evasions had been laid aside now as superfluous.

"I don't know," said Mary shamefacedly.

"Are you fickle after all? Have you changed toward your 'constant man?'"

"Where is the constant man she is trying to find?"

quoted Mary absently. "If he forgot his dead wife, would he not forget me too in time?"

"As afternoon forgets the dew,
As time in time forgets all men—
As our old place forgets us two,"

said Alice bitterly, bending over her last trunk tray. She straightened herself, and looking blankly before her for a few moments, as if making some final decision, said firmly, "If the past hinders you, why not try the future? The colonel has all his life before him. Vera did not change her life on account of Paul's earlier loves, and you said yourself their devotion was ideal."

"But it is just his future that troubles me," admitted Mary. "If he has no past, in the sense you mean, should I be sufficient for his future? Or should I be just one of a series? Would there not be the danger always of some new bird of more brilliant plumage coming to invade my nest in his heart? If he enjoys other women now, and he does; you know he does; I can't get out of my head that idea of Love's being a cuckoo——" she broke off—"If I have changed myself, why should not he?"

Alice turned her trunk key in the lock, and, throwing it into her open bag, bent over Mary, and took her sweet flushed face very tenderly in her burning hands.

"Do you love him?" she asked.

"Terribly. In spite of myself," Mary gasped, and flung herself face down, worsted, upon the bed. Alice

sat down beside her. "Listen to me, dear. Don't let your love be 'too strong to die, too weak to reach.' Tomorrow and yesterday will never be on speaking terms. Trust life! God gives it, and He means it to be the best gift a human soul can have. Don't shirk! Face it. If it ever seems to fail you, remember God is better able than you to provide an ultimate explanation. It is your duty to live. Don't expect perfection in man; look to God for that. You won't find it anywhere else, whether you marry one of these men or another. There is no constant man."

Mary kissed her fondly, leaning forward in loving abandon. "Thank you with all my heart," she said; "only my own mother would have spoken so to me. But I have been so wretched and weak and unhappy and undecided, I can't undertake any definite engagement yet. I shall just go over to England with Aunt Mary, and live out of doors and be the little daughter she has always wanted, until my father comes over to get me. I want to forget everything—and start all over again."

"Will he help you?"

"He sent me away. It's his fault as much as mine that this has happened," she added naively.

"And what is to become of the colonel in the meantime?"

"He is going to his own people, and may come down to stop with his uncle later."

"Let him help you forget, Mary dear," exclaimed Alice eagerly.

"You mean you think he is good at forgetting?" asked Mary. "You don't trust him either?"

"No, I only meant that forgetting was a sorry task for one, but a sweet pastime for two," she contradicted, returning the kiss. She did not smile. She had not smiled since the cable had been put into her hand. The shadow of her child's illness lay like a pall upon her breast.

She had wired the elder Arthur of her immediate departure, and had written also; but as no word had come from him her perplexity deepened.

"You will see him and explain everything?" she had begged of Mary, over and over again; and Mary promised faithfully to remain in Paris until Arthur came, though shrinking from the performance of so painful a duty. Alice would allow no one to go with her to Cherbourg. No one but Mary and her aunt's maid was permitted even to accompany her to the Gare St. Lazare. She preferred to be alone with her courage. She would not need to feign an appearance of cheer; this only the ordeal of her long voyage alone would hold for her. Already her terror for the little son had killed her hope; already, to her clairvoyant mother's agony, the child lay dead.

She had given all to her husband, even to this very risk of their son's life; and he was far away giving comfort to another woman. But in it all she had a thought for the trial of her little friend.

"I don't in the least know how it will all come out,"

she heard Mary repeating vaguely, as the train started. "I have no idea what I am going to do."

"You are going to do exactly as we all do," she said briefly in reply. "Follow your heart, and expect to be an exception to the rule the head lays down. You will probably do just what we women have done since we were first awakened out of dust to accompany Adam to his downfall, and shall go on doing to the end of time!"

Mary, watching her friend's dear white face disappear as the train moved slowly out, knew she had spoken the truth.

CHAPTER XXII

THE WILL OF ZEUS

DURING this same month of April, that young crescent, mirrored so calmly upon the breast of the smooth-flowing river at Cosne, or peeping through the budding branches of the forest of Fontainebleau, had been visible to Vera, too, tossing as a golden shallop on the restless waves below the villa. She was standing by the wide-thrown window of her boudoir as Paul came up the stairs one evening and paused at the open door.

"Come here, cher chéri, and look at the new moon over your right shoulder!" she cried, drawing back the light curtain to make room for him beside her.

He came slowly forward, and glanced, as she bade him, to where the young desirous crescent lay on the flushed horizon; but his gaze soon drooped hungrily to her face, as if seeking some promise nearer and warmer than the golden moon.

"There! Now you are safe for a month," said Vera contentedly, drawing his hand across her heart. "It is my only born superstition, seeing the new moon. I feel a real unrest if I see it at an unfavorable slant."

"It has no real significance," he said thoughtfully, "like those omens founded on fixed phenomena. What would it avail, for example, if you had seen it

over the ominous, and I over the favouring, shoulder? That was Saint Augustine's dilemma of augury, you remember; the unequal fate of two men born under the same star."

"Did you see it before you came in, Paul?" she asked; instantly she was troubled again.

His only answer was to close her searching eyes with a gentle kiss.

"The only heavenly light I want to shine on me is yours," he said. "My moons would never wane, or my stars grow dim, if your eyes shone always on me as they do at this dear instant."

For a long minute they stood gazing deep into each other's eyes; then the man sighed. In answer to her quickly questioning glance, he but sighed again.

"What has happened to you, Paul? Why are you sad?"

"Tell me, *bien aimée*," he asked; "do you too not regret to leave the dear villa, so embalmed with sweet memories? Are you not also even a little triste as I, that the winter is past and gone, and we must turn away from our nest among the flowers?"

"*Tu sais bien*," she whispered, and raised her hand to her heart as if oppressed. "It is like death here, in my heart. I suffer in this departure more than you can think."

"I too, I too," he sighed; "the years to come may be as sweet again, but we shall grow old. This year will never return to us."

Vera smiled up at him.

"It will only be a little while, and we shall return again to our nest. These same roses will be climbing in at this window, the same heliotrope will make the nights enchantment without the noisy nightingale. Even the little white violets will push up under the shelter of the wall beneath the mandarin trees. We shall forget we have been away, in the joy of our return. To find the forget-me-nots in bloom and the orange trees in bud—our marriage flower——" she smiled faintly, with half-closed eyes, as if yielding completely to the seduction of her fancy. His lips covered her own, only withdrawn to murmur: "It is nature that returns by instinct; life has in it something eternally vanishing—*hélas! ça passe.*"

She was at loss to account for his depression. He had not allowed a hint of his own distaste for their departure to escape him until now. How could she divine that the same crescent, which to her had seemed to promise a happy return, had come to him over the fateful shoulder with sinister warning, that, in spite of his professions of incredulity, he had not been quite able to disregard or forget? He assured himself it was nonsense, yet repeated phenomena, however unfounded, had a certain weight of authority. Ah, no, Vera was his fate, in the sense that life and fate govern the will and action, and terminate at the dissolution of human limitations. It was never his habit to struggle; he let fate overtake him as she would. It was as if he listened to the Greek chorus, chanting unseen of what was still to occur, and then acted

blindly under its suggestion. Now, as ever, he would not try to command circumstances. He awaited destiny.

“Only two days more together in this paradise!”

It was Vera who sighed now, gazing off over the purple sea and the fragrant gardens. “Good-bye, my nest of dreams! Adieu, dear *crépuscule*, sweet nights and yellow moons that shall seek through these same gardens after me in vain!”

“Vera!” he protested, “do not be cruel in your serenade. It is my fault that we are going. I am at the end of my force. It is necessary to accept this American proposal. My affairs are very ‘exigeant’; but nothing will be of importance long. Besides, the events of the last weeks have made it desirable to leave it all for a time; to let all be forgotten. Impressions soon fade. The coldness of a passing moment does not endure.”

Vera’s face hardened. Then there had been a scandal, after all? He had felt a coldness, or at least a difference, since the duel; it was not her imagination. Her manner became curiously unsympathetic.

“You admit a certain coldness of late?” she asked.

“I admit I was before a high hurdle, financially, and not with the same spirit I had once,” he confessed; “but *que voulez-vous, mignonne?* It is an affair of no importance. We take a voyage, and after, all restores itself as before.”

Vera resisted his light assurance. Her preoccupation became more grave at once.

“Ever since you refused to let Arthur help you I have been haunted by a sickening fear,” she said. “My days have been full, but my heart has been empty and unsatisfied, with the pretence of our relation to each other. I have tried to keep my feeling to myself, but if we are to hope for a future together like our past, as you say we are, I must get rid of this spectre for ever. I hate to speak of it, because I dread to destroy a happy hour, but since you have spoken of a certain change toward you among your friends, surely I may ask the cause. Oh, Paul, is it not because, in spite of all my entreaty and offers to help you, you have chosen to let a woman pay your debts of honour? A woman notoriously in love with you? How can you expect the world to regard you as before? How can you deceive yourself into thinking your wife would remain unchanged after such an indignity? You are ready to accept Arthur’s aid in establishing desirable business connections for you in America, but your stupid pride would not let you take from him the assistance that might have saved us this breath upon your honour and mine. If I am unjust, why should I not be? One day you have debts and no credit farther; you are harassed, disheartened. Shortly after, you are again free from care; money is in evidence on every side. You do not confide in me, I am kept in ignorance because I begged you not to lower yourself. I thought you did lower yourself to accept disreputable offers of money, urged upon you by some one who I believe would work your ruin just for

the triumph of saving you and putting you in her debt."

If she had not been so swept along by her torrent of speech, she would have seen the expression on Paul's face, and paused.

"One moment," he begged courteously. "You are capable of believing, after our conversation together, that I took money from Madame Prévile?" He considered her with surprise only.

"What else is there left for me to think?" she asked. "You tell me absolutely nothing."

By a painful effort he continued gently: "Why should I tell you the disagreeable things of life? It is not my habit." His manner betrayed more of weariness than bitterness; signs that were for her again so full of reproach. And yet she could not let the disagreeable things pass.

"Can you deny what I have said?" she demanded.

"If you can ask me to deny such a chimera, yes."

His wit forsook him in this unprecedented emergency. How to begin? How to satisfy her, make her reasonable? "You are quite right in your intuitions, but not in your conclusions," he objected. "I was desperate for money, as you surmised. I did borrow what was necessary for the moment. Madame Prévile did, in anger at my repeated refusals, no doubt, manage through her own paid tools to get my honour into her hands. To escape the possibility of a bondage so distasteful I took money from a man whom I trusted to my luck alone to repay. I took it, and grâce à Dieu!

I returned it and more! I borrowed not of Madame Préville, but of my own butler, to pay her, for your sake. It was the faithful, humble hand of François that was extended to save me. He risked his all; a lesson in brotherhood which the constitution of the republic had never impressed upon me before! Are you satisfied?"

He asked, because she did not speak or move, and then went on:

"I should naturally have preferred to spare myself the humiliation of telling you such a history, so sordid, so shameful. It was my secret. But you have demanded it from me, though you may now be no more content than before."

"It was my right," repeated Vera.

"Your right, hélas! yes. Unhappily you preferred it to your sacred privilege of confidence in me."

But all her suffering and suspicion had fermented to expression. She was bent on the final truth now; their lives depended on it, even though she knew that with him, or for him, she would gladly have sinned against the truth. It was not immorality that separated them now—no actual deed could weigh with her against Paul's love for her. It was his holding her outside of himself, where he held the rest of his world, that cut. When the confidence of his soul failed her, she felt herself lost. In her despair she queried further.

"If you really owed that woman nothing, Paul, why did she instigate a quarrel between the prince and

yourself? If he is her present protector, she is concerned in the explanation. It follows, without saying."

If she had struck him a physical blow, Paul would have been better able to reply. The lack of sympathy in her voice, the penetration of her intuition, bordering too closely upon vulgar curiosity for his sensitive good breeding, repelled him for the first time since their marriage. His disappointment in her, and in this outcome to their propitious fates, blinded him to expediency or to love itself.

"If you suppose Madame Prévile to be the subject of the recent unpleasantness between Prince Dimitri Nicolieff and myself, you are both unjust and misinformed," he remarked quietly.

"Do not say misinformed," warned Vera, "as if I had questioned people or listened to gossip concerning my husband or his affairs. You said yourself your quarrel related to a woman, and what other woman could it be?"

"Be that as it may," assented Paul, "the woman directly responsible for our disagreement was not Madame Prévile. Nor do I for one instant believe it possible, or probable, that she was instrumental in stirring the animosity of the prince against me. She is far too generous by nature; and her acquaintance with the prince is far too formal. He is not a man who establishes 'relations' with women. He is very correct, as you know perfectly. It is a poor return for my abandon of devotion to you, *chère amie*, that

you can put this woman's name here. It is only *faute de mieux*. It proves that no other comes to your lips after these years together! But why should I expect you to be just toward her or to him, since you are not willing to be so even to me?"

The haughty expression his inferiors knew so well spread over his face. His proudly set head instinctively lifted, as if to challenge the whole evil-speaking world. His finely cut features sharpened perceptibly. Perhaps he cared too little what any one thought of him to plead or to lie. Vera knew that it was now her turn to make concessions. There was no caress or supplication to be hoped for from Paul de Hauteville now. She had pushed her inquisition too far. Unlike most men, he would not resort to the easy lie, the marital cure for all uncomfortable situations. He would have scorned it, especially with a woman. It implied weakness in the man who did it. It was "lache"; fit only for underlings to hide an escapade from a master. He had never known a woman he considered worth such a lowering of his self-respect. Let a woman think what she would: love conquers the best and worst alike, had been his formula. It is for a man to live his life, and hers too. No European woman would have expected otherwise.

He had never seen Vera so handsome as she was now, standing there before him, defiant, her eyes brilliant, her face white as the flecks of foam on the curling waves beneath the windows. She was as beautiful as a rebellious angel. He felt for her a sentiment

profound as it was hopeless. He would have overwhelmed her with his old passion, without fear of resistance, had he not felt it was Vera's place to offer reconciliation, and that this novel pleasure would soon be his to receive. It would be exquisite to make a feint at first of resisting her, to remain with eyes half closed and hear her low voice as it entreated him; to hold himself unmoved as her eyes lifted tearful, to his, and her vivid lips trembled nearer his own. Only a little span of life forward and their paradise would be opening before them again; and hers must be the hand to draw him thither. He knew it was not principle that held her from him now; it was her tyranny of passion, that would not be diminished by the loss of one breath unshared with her. So he waited, while she remained obstinately mute. Seeing it, he shrugged, in the fashion that always made her shrink from him. He had never shrugged at her like that before. She could not avert the contempt of it. It cut sharper than his words that followed: "So, then, if you do not wish to believe my word, the dream is done. With confidence goes all."

He turned as if to leave her, but she started toward the door and blocked his exit.

"Why do you refuse me the whole truth," she cried, "the consolation for those miserable hours alone? Why do you conceal the truth from me?" she besought him.

"I conceal nothing that concerns you. I have told you all that concerns you," he replied.

"Then if it is all so simple and innocent why do you create a silly mystery to torment me?"

"There is no mystery except such as you are making for yourself, for your own torture."

Still, she would not yield. If he had been in her place, he thought, ah, how he would have yielded! *Mon Dieu!* What mattered anything but love to a woman? For what else was she made?

"You have not told me," she insisted, "what woman caused that miserable affair with the prince. That I must know. I cannot live unless you are going to tell me."

"She is long dead," he said solemnly.

"You loved her?"

"Yes."

"Before you knew *Madame Prévile* perhaps, when you were that innocent boy you described so touchingly."

"Precisely."

Jealousy drove her on anew.

"Ah, then, it was true, what I told *Henri de Gaston!* Love is a wandering voice, a Cuckoo, and lays her eggs in any chance nest, by caprice." She was rapidly losing all self-control. "Even you whom I adored, you whom I trusted as I never remembered to trust the God above me, are like all the rest! Your heart where I lavished my love, your embraces to which I gave myself utterly, were not sacred. You had banished one woman to make room for me, and now you confess you had loved another before her. There is no abiding

love; no man resists that wandering voice either by principle or inclination! We women may believe your pasts our own, and be ourselves but usurpers of another's right. We may sing secure of our happiness, and the fatal wanderer pushes us from your hearts in the very act!"

She threw out her arms toward the sea below; her voice became monotonous in its misery.

"Oh, if I had only had the courage to go down into those waves when the moon waited for me! I have no father, no mother. I have only you in the whole world, and I have no moral right to you!"

"Calm yourself Vera,—you are mad. You will make yourself ill," cried Paul, in real alarm at her hysterical outburst. "If you compel me to speak of all this, listen. You have already heard the story of Madame Prévile. You are sufficiently a woman of the *grande monde* to know and accept it without concern or comment. The subject of the insult from Prince Dimitri, *to me*, is most painful: the most painful of my life. I ask you to be generous and spare me its recital. It casts no shadow that could wrong you or touch your absolute right to my eternal devotion. Will you believe me if I swear it by our sacred perfect love, and spare me the needless distress of a repetition? It will cost you no sacrifice of honour or truth, and it will win for you the undying gratitude of the husband who is also your lover, and who has loved no living woman but you and lives only in you and for your happiness?"

His face was full of emotion. He never seemed to her so ideally the one fated for her out of all the world. His clenched hands, denoting the tension of his nerves, made her pale with desire to snatch them to her heart; yet she could hesitate. And seeing it, he made a swift motion of despair: they were lost to each other at last.

If I spare you now, her manner implied, it will be at the cost of a lifetime of lingering uncertainty. He comprehended the lack of response to his appeal, the intentional withholding of herself; words were not necessary.

If I could only know! her whole being seemed to insist. Ah! that longing to know which is the curse of mankind indeed: that "burden of the valley of Vision" laid on the song-weary sibyl who prayed to be excused from it. Will women ever use its instigations for happiness, not for woe? Vera's eyes strayed through the open door to the sibyl above his desk as if she read his thought.

"Your sibyls want to know; it is not wicked of me to want to know the truth once for all," she insisted. "I am asking you to exercise your faith in me. I do not ask just to *know*."

"But knowledge is final."

"Love is more profound; more Christian also."

Still he saw no impulse of belief or condonation in her cold face. He accepted her verdict sadly and sternly; with something also of a shadow of disdain. He began, as if weighing every word.

"You have no right to humiliate me, or, as if that

were not sufficient, to demand the consequent abasement of the dead," he said. "But because I have loved you as a spirit of flame, and wished to spare you every moment of suffering or burden of illness; because I have borne the lashings of all natural instincts, and, at last because I have loved you better than self or honour, and because you have refused me the proof of your love, I will give you this crowning proof of mine, and break the silence of the tomb. Prince Nicolieff referred in his insult to my sainted Mother. He is a man of honour; he had been drinking, or the insinuation would never have escaped him."

"Your mother?" was all she could find to stammer.

"My mother was a Jewess. A great heiress of a house that boasts some of the greatest names of German literature and finance. Prejudice had harmed both her and myself more than once. I wished to shield her memory. I did not wish you ever to learn of the strain of her blood in me. I understood the American attitude better than you think,——"

If she had gone to him then, warmed his marble lips with her own breath, restored him by her woman's tenderness and overruling passionate sympathy and remorse, it might yet have been in time. Alas! Again she was too much on her guard; too sure of herself, too little ready to let herself go to him.

"And you really expect me to believe that two men fought for so slight a provocation as a remote insinuation against the birth of one of them?" she said with the drawl he so dreaded for its derision. "Ah, mon

ami, you will have to be more plausible if you really wish to win my pardon for your long habit of secrecy!"

Paul drew back. They stood like the famous statue of those groping hands, Love in Death, seeking each other through a dividing, impenetrable wall.

"I have nothing more to say," he said, bitterly regretting his wasted profanation. He had shown her a Frenchman's shrine, and she had scoffed at it. It was a sacrilege beyond repair—a desecration he could never forget even if he learned to forgive.

The ball given by the old Baroness Baroch that night was to be the last brilliant event of the season. Even the Viceroy and the deaf prince made it an exception, and lent the approval of their presence briefly, before withdrawing to one of the many little tables on the balcony, where they drank to each other's health, and to the successful escape of Monsieur and Madame Johnston from the social perils that had threatened them.

"At first," said the Viceroy, "it is understood Nicolai knows more of the secrets of all the world, because he wastes no words; and after, the wife was no easy prey. He might have married the other, the little dove with the soft eyes, but no. He is of a strange heart, our Nicolai. When he knew them safe, and that for them there was nothing of danger more, he became absent, indifferent as before. I would have made it possible for him to marry if I had not too well

remembered our Russian proverb, 'The fool who wants to help you is more dangerous than all your enemies.'

"I do not hear you," said the deaf prince, "but I raise my glass to Madame Johnston. She did not once interrupt me at the *déjeuner* given in her honour. She is an exceptional woman." And summoning a servant he sent away the bottle that was not of the exact temperature he esteemed important, and became absorbed in his monologue on the abuse of good wine in the hands of the irreverent. The old Viceroy went on with his own thoughts, perhaps his own regrets.

Comte de Hauteville led the cotillion with a grace incomparable, an effort he was rarely willing to make, though often importuned. He danced more assiduously than was his indolent habit, and his flashing spirits were remarked by many who of late had deemed him spiritless.

Vera's passive beauty was equally remarked among the gesticulating French women, and many eyes followed her persistently as she danced. It was almost daybreak, just before the magic of the ballroom had begun to lose its glamour, when Paul led her out for the first time upon the floor. They had encountered each other often in the chance figures of the night, but he had not been her partner. They danced in silence now, for a strange thrill of new distance and old intimacy constrained them equally. Paul's touch was fire to her veins, lending her face an unreal light, an ecstatic forgetfulness of all that separated them. To

him the pleasure was as acute as pain. When the music died, with a long sad sigh, he echoed it with his own. She inhaled it with a pang of sudden longing. "You dance divinely, Paul," she said, "I am glad it was the last; and you saved it for me."

"That is why it was yours," he replied instantly, holding her to him for a moment. "For me it is in reality the last dance; the last, as the best, of me, is always yours."

They parted on the stairway of their own villa an hour later: he to the gardens for his sleepless tramp, she to their sleeping-room above. She was spent in body and spirit. She tried to cling to the hope that all would yet be as before between Paul and herself. But sleep soon overpowered her; sleep uninterrupted and dreamless, until unwonted noises and startled talking from the adjoining room, Paul's dressing-room, aroused her.

It was François who broke it to her at last; François, whose voice was strangled between sobs and the respect due his young mistress' greater grief; that frozen grief which neither moaned nor wept though Paul, too, had found sleep at last; no telltale clue as to the means by which his sleep of death had been wooed and won about him, the little amulet of his childhood lying still and unmoved upon his breast.

When the appalling necessity had arisen for notifying the police, François had despaired anew over the depredations of the law upon the privacy of his Mis-

gress. It was the ugly urgency of her sanction that had forced him to make the revelation, before her friends could be informed and hastened to her side. He knew his master's friends better than the valet, who, though nominally closer to Monsieur le Comte, was a newcomer in the establishment. He knew the habits of the menage, and his impulse would have sent him first to the telephone to communicate with Baron von Wreden or the American gentleman and lady, unhappily departed, but for his instinct to avoid the publicity of the disaster. Until the proper forms had been observed, and the proper account of the master's sudden death agreed upon, there should be no announcement.

His poor old lips drew and twitched convulsively as he asked for permission to do what must be done. Madame la Comtesse assented to all, but so vaguely he was not sure she had heard him, or knew even yet to what she had assented. She acted dazed beyond comprehending; senseless. François felt for her the instant need of an equal, a friend, some woman, to be near her in this crisis. He bade her maid stand guard outside the door, and then sent the young footman with an oral message to the baron.

Who could have foreseen, what neglected oracle could have predicted, that the messenger should have found it necessary first to notify Madame Prévile? And what contradictory fate could have inspired Lady Kintore, standing at her open window just above the apartment of the actress, to overhear the strange col-

loquy between the flunkey and his former mistress? By further random chance the flunkey, having found Baron von Wreden, and accompanying him upon his distracted way back to the villa, encountered Lady Kintore again face to face. She gave him a searching look that pierced even his treacherous comprehension, and kept on with them both, regardless of the baron's ejaculations or the servant's professions of ignorance, to the villa, which she entered silently. She brought much assurance to old François, who recognised at once in combination the understanding of a woman and the iron control of high birth. The baron was too much moved to be of use, but Lady Kintore was clearly of resource. She was indeed like a fine engraving, with lines deep cut beyond the possibility of a blur, serious, self-contained, sustaining.

Vera's door continued closed. Not until the coroner began his searching questions and demanded the appearance of Madame la Comtesse, did any one of them dare to intrude upon her. Henri de Gaston, hastily summoned, had soon become hysterical, and the servants, demoralised by his example, hung in little groups about the lower floors whispering emotionally, and quite useless.

The medical examiner, detecting traces of poison, had finished his duties and withdrawn. The coroner, searching the motive of the death, pressed his questions in formal relentlessness. According to the drift of his examinations, one would have thought the Comtesse and the butler were alike involved. He grew more

obsequious as his insinuations approached the nearer toward accusing circumstances.

If the heart of François could have received a sharper wound that morning it received it now in this vile distrust that menaced his mistress, the idolised wife of his dear master. He scarcely heeded the suspicions cast upon himself, he, the pride of whose life had been Monsieur le Comte.

One by one the servants were called and questioned. None of them had actually seen their late master after his departure for the ball the night before. The valet had obtained permission to absent himself for the night. His master had not been sleeping well of late; had been irregular in his habits of retiring. That was all he could tell, evidently all he knew.

Slowly the minutes wore by, every circumstance made to point more and more pitilessly toward the complication of the wife in the mystery. In vain had François sworn, in the interest of madame, that Monsieur le Comte had, since a long time, been in a nervous and critical condition; that he had experienced a "crise de nerf" even so recently as before his departure for the ball with madame. It was true, sans doute, that he had also suffered from acute attacks of the heart; he had himself been called to measure the medicine for him many times; had done so upon the request of his master; the last time, only the evening before.

Still the coroner demanded the wife.

"Madame la Comtesse will be able to inform us if there has perhaps been any little disagreement; if Mon-

sieur le Comte has been suffering from any mental derangement, par exemple. Her manner will exculpate her without doubt. It is a form, though in this instance unfortunately my duty, much to be regretted, naturally," he concluded mendaciously.

"You will kill her if you but suspect it is her fault!" cried Henri de Gaston. "He was her God. Spare her! Say that I murdered him. Call it jealousy! The good God knows it was often in my heart!"

The coroner was deaf to his outcry.

"In all such cases of accidental overdose of poisoning, so-called," he said indifferently, "it has always been held necessary to establish a motive or apprehend the criminal. If the wife is innocent, it is not difficult to establish her innocence. Some one is guilty of a crime, you comprehend," addressing himself to von Wreden. "The law must determine where to place the responsibility for this so-called accident. The gentleman by your side has already compromised madame by his admissions."

"My friend had not, since a few weeks, been himself," admitted von Wreden thickly. "But it is not that his wife can be guilty or that he a coward was, to end all."

"It is imperative to proceed with order and justice. We are losing time. Let your mistress be called at once," was the coroner's order to François.

The old man did not stir to obey, looking to von Wreden instead for help.

"Spare her!" cried Henri, beside himself. "Remember the shock to a woman's heart. Leave her aside! I supplicate you to implicate me in any manner, but let her remain in the sacred embrace of her last illusion, alone with her grief!"

The cooler eyes of the baron noted an expression of satisfaction on the coroner's shrewd face. Henri was only intensifying conviction. He laid a hand on his shoulder, as he shook his noble head in disapproval.

"No, my friend," he cautioned bravely, "the law has right. Man cannot take the place of another, even when he ever so dearly wishes. Let our dear friend be summoned, and for herself, speak."

But Henri had rushed already from the room, to seek a woman's aid in his distraction. He found Lady Kintore erect in the centre of the great music-room, and facing her, the last person he had the least expectation of seeing, the comédienne, Hélène Prévile.

"She has killed him!" he heard the actress cry passionately. "Her jealousy has done this! It was all written in his palm. He knew it was coming, and I knew it. He was a fatalist. It made him indifferent to effort or danger, par exemple, but it gave a dull terror when the omens were against him. It paralysed his will at last. He gave himself up and called it the will of Zeus. She turned from him. It is her work. I will not rest until she suffers as she has made him suffer,—as I am suffering now!"

Her voice choked itself with its intensity. The crisp

calm voice of the Englishwoman replied to her, a suppressed note of Rule Britannia in each rebuke.

"You quite forget yourself, to come here at this time and scream as you are doing. It is not to be thought of, that you should intrude yourself upon Madame de Hauteville now or later, You shall not be given an opportunity to look upon the mortal remains of the man you have tried to wrong by accusations against his wife. He idolised her, as you are well aware. You will gain nothing by your intrusion here to-day, or at any future time. I am informed of your design, but your word, as you are also aware, as that of all your class, does not count as valid evidence in the courts of France. There remains for you only to retire. You will succeed in compromising no one but yourself by any further effort."

Lady Kintore drew back the curtain herself and showed the actress out, cowed and subdued. As she turned again Henri beckoned from the stairway where he stood transfixed. In hurried whispers he explained what was taking place above.

"It is a conspiracy, a plot," he cried. "It would have driven Paul mad to have her suspected."

"May I go up to them?" she asked.

"If you only will!" he implored.

She was an Englishwoman, the wife of a soldier, and she loved fair play above all things. She liked to cross swords too, most awfully, if it was above board; and she had liked the man whose end was so doubly clouded. She threw up her white head as if the distant

blare of bugles had sounded in her ears, and walked unannounced into the chamber of death. That there was a sword within her scabbard, no one who looked on her could doubt! An official stepped toward her as if to impede her progress, but she did not heed him. The coroner approached her civilly, and requested her to leave the room, for the present.

"Allow the wife of an English general to pass," she said, her old eyes flashing like the glint on drawn bayonets. The coroner drew back. She did not hesitate nor falter, but marching straight to the lifeless form of the count, bent over and deliberately spread open the stiffening palm, studying it as if unaware of the presence of any others about her.

There it was, legible as an open page before her. She noted the mount of Saturn in excess, giving predisposition to suicide; the line of the head, toward its close, mounting suddenly to the line of the heart, tokening early death; even the semicircular figure attached to the line of the head, below it, was not lacking:—a threat of violent end by one's own hand. She even stopped to observe the cross in the centre of the palm under Saturn, indicating a love of occult science and mysticism, and the gambler's third finger spatulate and longer than the first, to confirm her claim.

For several slow instants, which seemed minutes, no sound or movement broke the hush; then, laying the dead hand down as tenderly as if it had been her own son's, she drew herself erect and turned upon the coroner, whom alone she addressed,

"Coward! How much were you to be paid for instigating suspicion here? The man was a suicide. It is all in his hand. If you are skeptical as to the science, there is one other woman who can give you certainty. I will not speak her name in this presence, but my accusation will be easy to confirm. There is the flunkey placed here through her influence and paid from her pocket, and her instructions to you to come here in the ostensible interest of law and justice, but with her gold before your eyes!"

She overwhelmed them all. The upholder of justice himself never knew how he had been brought to sign his necessary documents and get out of the villa, while her words still rang like threats in his burning ears.

"It was the will of Zeus! You are to declare it an accident," she asserted, until they all accepted it as such beyond question. It was mob psychology dominating them from the mouth of one determined dictator.

"To have acted otherwise would have been murder. The responsibility was entirely mine," she repeated later, in friendly council, in vindication of her high-handedness, after the aliens had withdrawn. "Vera is scarcely aware yet of what has occurred. Her mental balance is in a precarious condition. A very slight influence might fatally affect her. I shall stay with her, and those Americans must be sent for at once. It is a sad case, on my word! There must be some one who stands near to her, to see her through these first days. She is going to need protection!"

Henri de Gaston connected the insinuation, in a

glacial moment of comprehension, with the unsuspected duplicity of that same young lackey, upon a former occasion. He had been shown into the villa, in the absence of the master, it was clear enough now, to base the appearance of a clandestine interview upon Vera and himself, at the instigation of a woman less innocent than they who fell into her toils. It was the first of many plots, no doubt, to ensnare a man's happiness, laid by a woman lusting for revenge.

But all was peace and natural melancholy; every trace of tragedy or impending evil wiped away, when the old Englishwoman half-led, half-supported the stricken wife to Paul's little dressing-room. He lay there still in evening dress, a white gardenia,—Vera's flower—in his coat, an expression of utter repose upon his classically chiselled features. The Delphic Sibyl gazed down from the wall above his desk, with those eyes too young for the burden of her vision. The handicap of birth was taken off, the might of charms and the truth of omens forever powerless, the endless dream begun.

"Leave me," was all Vera said, and Lady Kintore left her alone with the past and the future.

Nothing broke the trance but the desolate wind that had risen, bending the palms and blowing the garden fragrance far out to sea. Out on the water the scudding clouds etched strange shapes upon the floods, and the sounding of the waves mingled confusedly with the rushing of the spring tempest, lashed on by that homeless wind of destiny which is more mighty even than the will of Zeus.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CUCKOO'S NEST

PAUL was laid to rest beside his father, and the mother whose memory he had so revered, on the estates of the de Hautevilles in Provence. Arthur's arrival in Monte Carlo was in time to leave again with the funeral cortège on Monday morning.

His appearance Vera accepted with passivity, without question. She waited or moved only at request, as a person fallen under complete hypnotic suggestion. By common consent, the place at her side was Arthur's. Though they all supported her spiritually, it was his arm upon which she leaned her almost inanimate form; his shoulder that was brushed by her exaggerated widow's weeds. French mourning, spectacular at best, heightened her marble composure and deathly whiteness, making her seem no less a victim of the will of Zeus than the actually deceased.

Perhaps Henri de Gaston suffered most at the sight of her. He longed to comfort her, but "C'est défendu!" cried his soul.

"Leave me," had been Vera's only appeal to any of them. "Leave me, if you approach you seem to push Paul away."

François and her maid followed her with touching

tenderness. They had sworn to remain with her as long as she might wish to preserve her retirement. She had decided to remain somewhere close to the tomb of her husband, hoping to find there, amid the scenes of his careless and innocent boyhood, a certain ghostly companionship denied her elsewhere. It was the only wish that had escaped her since the death of her life.

From time to time Lady Kintore, who never left her, directed a penetrating glance at her, under guardedly lowered lids, watchful for the collapse that seemed inevitable. But as yet the slight form held reaction at bay, and performed the ceremonious functions of Paul's last exit with exquisite fitness and detachment. Her bearing would have gratified her dead husband, so exacting in his regard for the formalities of any situation. Mindless, senseless, she moved as one immured in her own memory; untouched by all that went on about her, as unagitated by the parting rites as she was unconscious of the admiring, serious eyes bent upon her, the wife of the last Comte de Hauteville.

With Arthur's departure from Monte Carlo it happened that the telegram from Alice failed of its goal; so that while she was setting forth alone over the sea, with her sick child's hands beckoning her to hasten, uncheered even by a word of God-speed from Arthur, the little imp of a messenger boy was collecting his already prepaid "bleu" from the servant at the villa gates. He laid the bit of paper on a card table, on a mound of mourning cards and coroneted expressions of condolence, dismissing its possible importance from his

consideration. Arthur thought of Alice, of course, but he thought oftener of Vera just now, with a jealous protecting determination. He paled with pleasure at the remembrance of her slight form against his side. A sort of vertigo of the spirit, never hitherto experienced or imagined, made him blind to all facts of existence that lay beyond the gates of the château.

Already the first days of the springtime were upon them; the birds in the park were jubilant. Only once, during the evening following the obsequies, had Vera spoken with him of the future. It was dismissal; he had recognised it as such, but still clung to the idea that his own duty was bound up in her welfare.

"Think of me as dead, with him," she counselled; "here with the spring breaking over me, I shall often lie beside his tomb. The summer sweetness will find my heart with him; the fires of autumn shall not banish his spirit, or the closed windows bar his face. Even in the long nights of winter I shall be stealing to his side——"

She put her hands to her heart, as if to counteract an actual physical pain, and after a silence spoke on as if to herself.

"No voice can disarm the remembered charm of his. Here we are still one." Her manner was calm, though her words sounded hysterical; she went on in a monotone like that of the musical recitative she used to give in the vanished days of her happiness.

"I shall see him, feel him, hear him. I shall drink him in the raindrops of April, breathe him in the wind,

clasp him till the human leaves the haunt of the dead and steals to the judgment of the just! There, we part eternally—he to the reward that is his; I to the punishment that is mine. My heaven is here and now; it will be of short duration. Spare me one hour's loss of it!"

Certainly it was final, and yet he stayed on. But the picturesque romance, sad, sombre, desolate in meaning as it was, in which he moved with such artistic appreciation and slumbering passion, was suddenly rent by the piercing news of Alice's solitary sailing, and the danger imminent to his only son. A man must be more foolish or more lost than our imaginative Arthur, to remain callous to the peril of his only son, his first born.

He had telegraphed on Tuesday; with an incoherent statement to the effect of his being detained indefinitely, or a few days longer at least. This message was opened by Mary, after Alice had gone, and it was her speedy response that awakened him from his funereal deliberations. Vera's claim upon him became indisputably secondary. She had von Wreden to father her, and Henri de Gaston to follow her like a faithful hound. Lady Kintore also was lavishing the long pent-up affection of her empty woman-heart upon the weak creature who had no kith or kin to stand by her in this forsaken hour. It was characteristic of Lady Kintore that her former indifference to Vera was now all submerged in her enthusiasm to shield her from the blows of fate. Give Lady Kintore something to protect, and youth and love came back to beautify her

energy and indomitable resolution. She became the darling of a crisis, by virtue of these same qualities that rendered her a dangerous explosive in the jars of common living.

Vera accepted them all and their ministrations, as she had accepted Arthur's coming, and as she was ready, much to his grieved surprise, to accept his proposed departure. From hour to hour he still postponed his leave-taking. Alice had gone, he argued; there was no need to follow her except by a fast steamer; a slow one would only be longer in the end. The attitude of Henri seemed more clearly defined, more reasonable than Arthur's.

"Me,—I wait," he had said simply, in response to Arthur's well-intentioned probing.

"Now, it is only Paul who exists for her. He takes his revenge in this hour, for all. But the day will surely come when the odour of the tube roses will become suddenly insufferable. The peace of the tomb will give place to the fever of life. She will remember that she is young, beautiful, and always a woman to be loved; yes, and Paris only a twilight journey away. For a time she will imitate in her life the inscription on the tomb of Abélard and Héloïse. But the French say nothing lies like an epitaph, and it will weary her at last. I shall be always waiting for this fatigue, this moment supreme. I shall know well how to profit by it. No one comprehends her now as I. We shall perhaps be very miserable, but together we shall have some exquisite satisfactions. I will wait only."

"I don't know what my aunt would say to my leaving her here alone in this way," Arthur repeated, over and over, to von Wreden, as they paced the leafy allées of the park the evening before his actual departure.

"It is not of what your aunt shall say, but what your good wife is even now bearing that I think, hour after hour," the baron replied.

"Of course; so am I thinking of her," Arthur assured him; "but Vera has lost everything, and Alice still has me——"

"No, truly, it is of two different beings that we speak. You shall not confuse them. It is the mother only who really lives. Our little Vera is but an artist, and as such we must ever make our judgment of her, not as a woman. Ah, if she had been the womanly creature that Frau Johnston is, our friend Paul would not even now lie dead: his mind unsound, his heart broken!"

"And her heart broken, her own life destroyed!" Arthur interrupted vehemently.

The baron answered positively, without warmth.

"You forget, it is not reality from which Vera draws her being. It is the artist's world—sentiment, passion—all false, or say, rather, unreal. She was by her husband inspired, who would not teach her to live, or feared to endanger their happiness. Now——"

He hesitated, and Arthur cried:

"You think she is to blame for her misery?" It was a confounding suggestion.

"Even so," said von Wreden curtly.

"You are all wrong," protested Arthur. "She adored him: would have made every sacrifice for him."

"She perhaps sacrificed others to him; but to forget herself——" he paused dubiously. "Impossible," he concluded, shaking his head.

"If I had dreamed you felt this way toward her, I never would have left her! I would have insisted on her returning to America with me," declared Arthur.

"Ach nein! She would not go. She will ever a sad satisfaction find in placing the flowers on his tomb. She is of the dramatic women, who enjoy their own perfection in any rôle they play. She will create with him a hidden life of passion—spirit with spirit. Any other would become too unselfish, too inartistic."

"How can you speak so," said Arthur, "of a woman in the first bewilderment of her darkness and solitude, left to meet her broken life alone?"

Von Wreden laid his strong hand on Arthur's shoulder and spoke to him as if he had been nothing more than a wilful child.

"Perhaps it is because I understand, that I must pity more. Yet of that other? She who has gone alone to meet the hardest trial possible for man or woman. Perhaps not illness alone, but death, awaits her, too. Ach, my dear young friend, you do not know the worth of such a woman. The mother of your children. Such a heart of truth she has!"

"Vera has no such comfort, as Alice has in her children," Arthur began, but von Wreden cut him short.

"No, poor Vera does not know the dignity of the

depths of life. God be thanked, my good Frau and I had this blessing, even though our treasure now is lost—

‘Ins stille lande!
Ins land der grosser Todten.’

In the love of such a woman as the mother of your children, heaven has thrice blest you. If the good God takes from you, she will yet give again. She your hope and your future is. Schnell! Fahren sie fort! Of life the triumphant torch bearer she will prove herself.”

Arthur bared his head to the soft night sky. The old German had touched the universal string that never vibrates in vain—“the good c major of life again.” His face revealed saner thinking in his mind as von Wreden continued, looking up at the stars for inspiration—“If love beyond the first passion, between man and woman develops not, there is for the child no provision made. If love of sex suffices, where is the need of the child to fill the life? Development arrested is. Think not on any barren desire, when love of father and mother through the miracle of childhood and paternity await. Ach! it is something only in the heavens found; that love of father and mother for each other and the dear children of love. How you would understand if, as we, you had brought into the world and lost! Do you not understand, my friend? My dear Herr Arthur, —nein?”

And there, suddenly, beneath the stars of the pure

night, with the homely gutturals of the honest baron sounding in his ears, a new tune began to sing in Arthur's heart. He did understand—yes. The grip he gave the baron's hand in response was impulsive and sincere. He left the château at dawn, with the song of birds in his ears, and a new illumination in his heart. Vera had scarcely spoken in farewell. It was the grip of the baron's hand that stayed with him most during all the voyage westward.

Over the dancing waves the two great liners, his own and Alice's, sped only a few days apart; and in the changing rush Alice and Vera presented themselves to Arthur's mind more and more in chastened hues. Had he undervalued that which was after all beyond a man's valuation? Had it taken the most profligate society of Europe to teach him the pathway to the holy of holies? The realisation dazed him. His own impressionable nature stood out as both cause and effect of much in their mutual development, and he saw many things clearly for the first time.

Alice, on her part, bore the slow torture of suspense like any cheerful Spartan. No hint of her personal affairs escaped her. The events of the liner's day pursued themselves across her consciousness like an endless fugue. Methodically she ate, walked, or hung over the rail far up toward the bow, looking forward to the land. Ordinarily the steerage babies would have won her down to the lower deck, but now her eyes avoided the direction, as she herself abjured the hours when the children of the first cabin were most in view. By

a fortunate chance there was no familiar name on the sailing list, there was no danger of affectionate prying eyes to stab her courage, or well disposed tongues to lacerate her heart with platitudes.

Or so she told herself. She was quite bewildered on the third or fourth day out to hear her name spoken cordially, and to find herself accosted by none other than the man who had been to see the pyramids. He expressed surprise at seeing her alone, but she explained her return by a casual allusion to important business. He hoped her husband was well. She was glad to say that he was, and also returning almost at once. The inquisitor let her off easily enough in his zest for his own subject.

"Well, I understand your hurry to get back," he said. "I'm going straight home to Chicago as fast as steam can carry me." He settled himself against the rail, as if it were going to be a long story. "I'm going to make my will over. I'm going to leave a provision to have one of those pyramids copied for my monument. It will be worth money to Chicago to have it. I always said I would do it, if I liked them as much as I expected to. Molly would tell you so if she was on deck. She's heard me say so many a time."

"Where are you going next?" asked Alice politely. She preferred to keep him talking rather than be drawn out herself.

"I guess I'll go around the world. That is about all there is left to do. But I don't feel in a hurry about anything now I have seen the pyramids. It is a funny

thing. I have felt lonesome and aimless ever since I saw them. I tell you, Mrs. Johnston, whoever built those triangles out there on the desert had the right idea of construction. I have thought a lot about it lately. You want things in this world to stand all solid at the bottom and then taper off at the point. Then you get some effect of climax. Now my mistake was in going to the biggest things in the world first. I've got to see everything else thrown in the shade. I don't seem to care much for anything else now, after them. I feel as if I had reached the apex of the acme! I ought to have worked up to them more."

"Perhaps you are not the only one whose pyramids are standing on their heads," said Alice encouragingly,—"I should not advise you to give up because you found one thing just as big as you expected. You are not alone in that."

A steward fortunately, at this moment, immediately beside them blew the warning for dinner, and Alice made her retreat, smiling a queer, unsteady little smile—the first shadow of a smile since the cable was put in her hand.

To her exhausted nerves, long after she had lain down in her tossing berth, Vera, Mary and herself assumed the three angles of the pyramids, the three lines of womanhood, girl, wife, mother. She could not rid herself of the changeful phantasmagoria invoked by the suggestion: Vera following ideal love as a passionate chimera; Mary wanting to bond fate before she risked the darling experiment; and herself,—she was

not heroic enough to survey the mother-heart to-night. She switched on the light and read till morning.

Her arrival at last at her mother's home in the soft fresh damp of the early April nightfall she was never to forget. As she drove from the village station into the country, the frogs, those pioneers of spring, were piping high, and her thoughts flew back to the swamps where as a child she had hunted jack-in-the-pulpit, trillium, shy lady-slippers and all the other frail new comers of the early year. The air was sweet everywhere with moist earth, and over all lay the pungent lingering smoke of a charring bonfire, that familiar coadjutor of the New England householder at this cleansing season, potent with memories. Her fancy did double duty, running back over the associations of her girlhood, and leaping forward toward the dimly lighted room in the corner of the house straight before, as the horses climbed the last hill. That had been the nursery of old, where now some instinct told her that her own child, uncaptured by his mother's face above him, had been battling with his fever.

Even the folding of her own mother's arms about her in tragic comprehension was an obstacle in her lightning swiftness to reach her boy. Dropping her hat on a chance window seat as she passed, she took her place beside him, and gave it up to none. Opposition and remonstrance fell upon her as snowflakes upon a high tide. He was hers still; hers to touch and heal. All the tyranny of mother love was hers to exercise over him and his beloved fate. When he was restless

and spent with fever, she carried him untiring in her arms for hours as if he were a baby again. Her service for him was to her all one long, unbroken prayer.

"Why did you give him to me, if you were only going to take him away?" she demanded desperately of God, when the cherished life seemed to flicker and faint before her. The winter and its emotions were utterly wiped out. She forgot the plight of Mary and the unmasking of "the constant man." She did not even remember to pity Arthur, so strained and rapt was every faculty to serve and save.

It was an unequal fight from the first, and all over with shocking brevity, so that Arthur, arriving by the later ship, was not destined even to look upon the face of his son. When Alice threw herself into his arms, broken by her first passion of tears, he realised with a strange new thrill of power that her grief was the grief of a woman for whom consolation and shelter were to be found in the encompassing love of a man. Would he now be great enough to surround her needs, restore her faith in life, her hope in love? In her succeeding days of weakness a nobler conception of married joy and duty came to him than all her old heroic affection for him had ever been able to produce, and on this sadder and older Arthur, for the first time, she leaned the whole weight of her burdened heart; gave herself and her grief to his new tenderness unreservedly, as she had never known how to give until life had taken away. It was Arthur's strength that sup-

ported her feeble steps back to courage again; Arthur's will that nerved her resolution to every effort; Arthur's solicitude that foresaw every obstacle, guarded from every hurt the quivering wound that only time could heal. It was strange, but to them both very sweet, this reversal of their long-accepted attitudes. Alice realised it with a shiver for the possible future when the old order of things should naturally restore itself, but for the present their spiritual intimacy deepened as the days went by. They talked as they had never been used to talk before, each seeing the soul of the other in whiter, higher lights.

They often sat hand in hand by the open window at twilight speaking softly of the little son whose earthly future they had so minutely planned. The baby daughter had not been sent for yet from her uncle's house, and her three-year-old sky was still untroubled by the clouds that shadowed her parents' hearts. Alice had wished it so, and Arthur had been glad to let their first sorrow find consolation in each other's presence alone. That Alice wanted only him, had transfigured him in his own eyes. He rose to the stature of her requirements, supremely dedicated to his task.

Sitting thus one evening, he told her the broken story of those last days abroad: the days at the château of the de Hauteville's in Provence.

"I shall regret Paul always," she said sadly, "but the end was inevitable. To admit chance, not God, as the ruling force of the universe, is to put to sea without believing in the tides!"

"We shall never know why he did it," sighed Arthur.

"Vera knows. Her life will prove it," replied Alice quickly. "In some way she showed her limitations to Paul. He was ill; harassed; he could not face life tarnished, or less in anything than he had always been. It was Vera who somehow made him feel that the end had overtaken him. She ought to have been stronger than fate. That she was not will cause her unending remorse."

When the painful subject of Paul's death became too deep he sought to shift the current of their talk.

"If it is not Fate flying in the face of Providence that set Mary Ingram hankering for Lyndon-Carr," he exclaimed, "I don't know what to call it! She might be so happy in her own land, and off she must go to a barracks in Africa. I wonder if their crest will be Lady Kintore rampant?"

After a pause they both thought of Paul again. "Tiberius never flinched!" Arthur exclaimed. "She came to Vera immediately, and she will stay by her to the last gun. There are such women, thank God!"

"There always will be," said Alice gently, "and women like Vera too, who draw devotion to themselves unsought, and uncomprehended."

Arthur, watching her face turned toward the horizon, where the daylight still beat in pulsing colour, was seized with sudden compunction.

"Alice," he begged, "is love more cruel than death?"

Have you suffered from it too? Is poor Vera right, and is the ideal love we all long for as unreal as the cuckoo's nest, a mere poem of the imagination?"

Alice turned her dark eyes full upon him, a sudden light kindling them to their old beauty, their vision clearer for the tears that had washed the blur of self away for ever.

"Love is the most terrible responsibility the Creator has laid on mankind," she said, with unexpected fervour. "I almost said the most unscrupulous act of a consummate Force. Love as an appetite is more demoralising than drink. Love unbridled makes man a beast, and lower than the beasts. Love within law refines him to a spirit. Love for passion's sake is contamination. Love in sacrifice makes toward perfection. Love between man and woman as a religion, is God!"

"And marriage," he entreated, "is it only nature's trap, does it hinder love?"

"When it consecrates lust, it hinders;" was her reply; "when it is a sacrament of mutual aspiration, it soars! Marriage is woman's only eternal achievement. The gospel of the relation of one woman to the one man she marries has by the divine insight never been fully written; but never been lost. It is the law of its discipline that sets the spirit free."

"You would grant it the mating of body and spirit both?"

"Necessarily," she responded, undaunted; "without animal instinct it is as blasphemous to nature, as it is without moral sanction or spiritual mating to God. It

is the supreme consecration of all human wisdom and endeavour !'

"Alice, you are glorious!" he cried, springing to his feet. "I only wish von Wreden were here to hear you. He believes in you and all you stand for, with his whole heart and soul."

"I have made my own mistakes, dear," she said regretfully, the colour fading from her face; "but I have lived the truth into some convictions for myself, and none more absolutely, as you have so often heard me quote, than that the way to perfection is through a series of disgusts. The disgusts of the loose living we saw all about us over there have done their work; nothing but the endless trail of perfection will satisfy me after this. It is far enough from my attainment, I know, but little Arthur has blazed the way for me. I shall know the path where his steps tended by the blossoms that will spring up along his vanished track. You too, dear, are far ahead of me, hindered as I have been by my experimental disgusts."

Arthur's eyes filled. "I shall never forget von Wreden," he said as if to himself, clasping her hand more closely in his own. "It was he who put me on the first step of the endless trail as you call it. He made me see you as you are: it was a vision that has illumined my soul."

"It is a varying vision for us all, dear; a mystery," she said thoughtfully. "Vera could never again attain it. To her, ideal love will remain the cuckoo's nest, though she will try again to find it, if I am not

deceived in her nature. Mary has already listened to the vagrant 'wandering voice.' But here with us, the cuckoo's nest is a reality. Love sanctified as ours has been need fear no usurper."

"I know this letter from the dear old baron by heart, although it only came to-day," said Arthur smiling. She laid her head against his shoulder with a sigh of peace, as he repeated it word for word, and at the closing lines followed his voice with her own.

"—and I think that he also an angel is, and plays and speaks with our little Hulda together, these both, our beloved children, being ever the miracle of true love; but now returned to the good God who is himself our Father and Love eternal."

They were a long time silent, until Arthur said gravely: "The family is the only device that saves love for immortality. We have to learn that love like life is transformed in growth, but does not cease."

"Ah, that is the secret!" she cried solemnly. "You have discovered it now. Love is transition; it does not find sufficient satisfaction or conclusion in itself. It begins in self, but it must go on in others; live not in its own contemplation, but by renewal through our children."

Again they were silent and again Arthur broke the long significant meditation of their hearts, saying brokenly, as if smitten afresh by his irrevocable loss:

"If I should ever be so blest beyond all my deserts as to have another son given me, I should want to name him after von Wreden——"

"The voicing of my own dream," said Alice, lifting her face, brave in its determination to spend and be spent in love's ultimate service, to mate the natural longing in his eyes, while the soft April darkness hid their sacred avowals.

Meantime, though forgotten by Alice and dismissed by Mary, the "Constant Man" as they had vaguely styled the American lover, lingered on in Paris. Nor did he find it powerless to console. After Mary's somewhat shamefaced explanation of her heart's perfidy despite her will, he had accepted the situation with a grace surprising even to himself.

That he could have won her back he felt assured. He was not yet fifty; not too old to understand her, nor young enough to flagrantly waste her immature beauty. He had always exerted a magnetic charm over women. The mere youth of such as Colonel Lyndon-Carr could not have prevailed against his subtler resource. It shocked his fastidious ideal for Mary Ingram, that she should have wavered in her decision between them, and almost equally it shocked his inner consciousness that he had not felt any impulse toward bringing her once more under the power of his former spell.

His relations with women had been those of spirit intimacy, since the death of his wife had left his vital longing ungratified. He had told himself that he sought in other women only some wan reflection of her; goaded by the perfection of blissful memories. In Mary's withdrawal, the spirit of "things unseen" seemed to be reclaiming him. The shadows of vanished passion clung

about him while he yet mingled with the varying Parisian world, where his acquaintance was markedly cosmopolitan—for a scientist. He went much to the opera, inducing the amorous cadence of Manon or Louise to suffuse his passionate dream, with their iridescent pain and joy of love. No, he was not uncomfortable; if a man be but romantically wistful, that surely is not unhappiness. And who more adaptable than just such as he, to the solace offered by Paris in Springtime? Paris with her perpetual resource for the satisfaction of an impersonal desire!

He had not sought to keep himself within Mary Ingram's circle; less because her presence caused him suffering, than because it failed to give him any emotion whatever. Perhaps he took it on French authority that "the cure of love is more love," and that she held none of that healing for him in her command, since he did not wish to be thus healed. If one woman was no longer his, equally he was no longer hers. If one was lost to him, at least all were restored to him as potentially to be won. The eternal quest lured anew, and his heart was strangely alert to be on the trail he had believed closed to him for ever.

He had seen Mary but once since the formal announcement of her betrothal. The heavy ring she wore at that time had impressed him as a barbaric shackle. It was an heirloom of course. She told him proudly that it had belonged to the colonel's mother, out in India, and he had torn himself away long enough to go over to London and unearth it from the family treasures, to

set it as his sign of mastery upon her in sight of all the world. There was nothing subtle or wistful, nothing of the "things unseen" about this love-making!

Only once, and by chance, he saw the lovers together, and on that occasion he had chosen to remain unobserved. It was a late April afternoon in the Bois. The avenues were brilliant with humanity, the allées deep in their bronze green shade, inviting to murmured confidence or clandestine caress. Just as he was about to emerge from his stroll in the forest, whose soft leafage was already a'twitter with nesting birds, down the intersecting bridle path came a pair of flying horses; a tall blood bay with white feet, and a fiery roan of lighter build. He could scarcely have recognised the riders had they not reined in suddenly, no doubt in response to some caprice of the girl, who drew her mount to a standstill, looking back over her shoulder as she did so. Her face was turned away, but he saw them both plainly now and was near enough to overhear their careless words.

"He is coming, poor little dear!" cried Mary. "Buy them all, please. He looks so tired and hungry."

Lyndon-Carr dismounted, and, leading his tall bay a few paces back, met the little violet vender, who was running after them as fast as he was able without spilling his flowers from the basket on his ragged arm. The Englishman caught up all his stock, without stopping to count their paltry value, and tossing the child a flashing gold piece, hastened to rejoin his companion. His handsome figure just escaped a swagger; undeniably

his riding togs set him off to immense advantage. His insolent gratuity, the spendthrift youth of him also, struck the unseen critic unpleasantly. As Mary bent to him from the saddle to take her flowers, her hand, from which she had removed her glove, met Lyndon-Carr's for an instant. There was just time to note the great sapphire ostentatiously affirming possession of her; the slight form in its close habit of dark blue, cut English fashion, in honour of her future lord, presumably; the bunch of Parma violets he had given her at her breast.

"Happy?" the man asked laconically, as he swung himself into the saddle again.

"I have never lived until this afternoon!" she sighed. "I only wish it could last for ever!"

"It is going to!" and the expression on his face supported his belief in that immemorial assumption of lovers. She met his eager prophecy with a mute glance that was not alone adoring; a visioned glance aglow with the thrill of waking womanhood, swept clear of girlhood's uncertainties. She had taken the challenge life flung her, and gloried in it.

Seeing this, the older man unconsciously ground his teeth with sudden bitterness, as he watched them ride away from him into the daffodil sunset, side by side.

And from his corner of the balustrade high encircling the towers of Notre Dame, the Beast in stone, with wings massive, and tongue out-run in derision, still looks off over Paris; resting a weather-worn cheek on his supporting hand as were his watch destined to be long unrelieved. Life with the torch, Death with the palm, Seasons, Histories, leave him as they found him. The victims of the Seine claim no pity from him. He stares off over the tragedy and comedy played on beneath him all unmoved: a veritable mask of satire.

And when in the chronicles of wasted time the plumes of the horse-chestnuts lift themselves as if to wreath the flying buttresses in their fragrant bloom, he remains untouched by the immortal renaissance of spring, as by the last yellow leaf of the autumn; looking off over Paris, seeking the Cuckoo's nest perhaps, that home of the "wandering voice" of which so many hearts have sighed,

"And thou wert still a Hope, a Love,
Still longed for, never seen!"

THE END



Press Opinions of Mme. Bianchi's First Novel, "A Modern Prometheus"

Hartford Courant—"Father Bernardino is a wonderful psychological and religious study."

HON. W. H. MAC ELROY, in the *Utica Observer*: Because of its lovely genre pictures redolent with the transcendent charm of Italy, because of its unique study of the eternal feminine, its numerous epigrams, grave and gay, going to the marrow of significant things, its dignity without dullness, its wit and humor without flippancy, its freedom from platitude and all the familiar varieties of sensational tommy rot, "A Modern Prometheus" is a novel to be reckoned with.

Sun (Evening)—"A remarkable first novel. Strong, unyielding characters abide beyond the four hundred pages, beyond the background of church and monastery, the undercurrents of passion and dark deeds. The threads are closely woven, the struggle Promethean at the close."

Evening Post (New York)—"The interest holds to the end, indeed slips over the margin, since the last word leaves one guessing."

Springfield Republican—"An absorbing and beautiful story. One feels that Italy is rightly characterised here as in the writing of Browning and Landor."

Brooklyn Eagle—"A Modern Prometheus showing a striking quality in the excellence of its scenic description and in the crisp and attractive quality of its dialogue."

Book News Monthly (Philadelphia)—"Among the choicer books of the season."

Standard Union (Brooklyn)—"A masterpiece in scenic description and in the conversational ability of its principal characters."

New York Times—"The writer of this book has succeeded in creating an atmosphere; an atmosphere strong enough to distinctly affect the reader. It leaves behind a sense of fascination and mystery. One lays down the book with regret and comes into the light of common day with the sensation of blinking."

San Francisco Argonaut—"The book remains not only an interesting, but an important one."

Catholic Standard-Times (Philadelphia)—"Highly dramatic—there is evidence of much power in the construction of the book and of keen psychology as well as logical force in the story. The whole book is very cleverly done and is full of excellent by-play and sprightly fancy in the subordinate scenes."

Richard Barton in The Bell-Man—"A spiritual drama of vivid interest. A powerful situation handled by the author with skill. It is agreeable to read a novel in which the motives, as with the work of Fogazzaro and Bazin, are so freed from vulgarity, and one gets away from that insistence of love in its lower aspects which distinguishes and disfigures so much of modern fiction."

Detroit Free Press—"A novel of unusual calibre."

Cleveland Plain Dealer—"In many respects a notable work. It is written in a style far superior to the majority of present day novels. None of our writers have better caught and held the Italian atmosphere."

Los Angeles Times—"The book is enlivened and enriched with many sentences of an epigrammatic finish, weight and astuteness."









